

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: THE CULTURAL PRODUCTION OF CONTROVERSY:
FEMINISM, WOMEN AUTHORS, AND THE
MAPPING OF CHINA

Aijun Zhu, Ph.D., 2005

Dissertation directed by: Professor Jianmei Liu, Department of Asian and East
European Languages and Cultures

This project deconstructs the controversy of globally located Chinese women authors trapped in a dilemma between feminism, nationalism and neocolonialism, a dilemma complicated by the sometimes liberating yet voyeuristic, even pornographic, global popular culture. It attempts to negotiate a space for the female body in the age of economic and cultural globalization between feminism that celebrates it, nationalism that disciplines it and the flourishing global consumerism that profits from it.

The project argues that the controversy of differently located Chinese women authors, especially the contradiction between women and the nation/community, is culturally *produced*, as much by their works as by literary and cultural criticism of limited theoretical paradigms. It also argues that this controversy almost always goes hand in hand with the cultural production of an often reductive and distorted version of feminism. The ambition of the project is to *un-produce* the controversy through an

alternative feminist framework of criticism beyond current theoretical entrapments.

Focusing on four controversial contemporary women authors at different Chinese locations, this project emphasizes a politics of literary criticism or reading. Reading is crucial not because it understands an author's intended meaning but because it actively and aggressively produces different and often times conflictary cultural and political meanings of the text and the author. The project challenges the notion of "representational inevitability," a pervasive but seriously flawed reading practice that reduces creative texts to documents that essentialize the social, cultural or political conditions of their racial or national communities. Instead, it accentuates the more flexible concept of "cultural production." Instead of "representing" a preconceived essentialized totality of national realities, texts by Third World women authors produce part of national landscapes, which are constantly being produced, reproduced, revised or changed by different texts, authors and critics.

The goal is not just to provide a different feminist production of the texts by women authors of different global Chinese communities, but it is also to participate in the cultural production of feminist discourses, bringing attention to the often neglected negative representation of feminism in contemporary culture and to revise the feminist project in such a way as to detangle feminist critics from theoretically produced dilemmas. The controversy of Chinese women authors does not mean contradictions between women and the nation but tensions between feminist and nationalist discourses. It is necessary that feminism should be envisioned from outside, not of the nation but of (masculinist) nationalist discourses, in order to maintain its critical edge.

THE CULTURAL PRODUCTION OF CONTROVERSY:
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By

Aijun Zhu.

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Advisory Committee:

Associate Professor Jianmei Liu, Chair
Professor Merle Collins
Professor Claire Moses
Professor Deborah Rosenfelt
Associate Professor James Gao

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Preface

This project focuses on the controversy of contemporary women authors in different global Chinese locations. It investigates the cultural production of the tension between feminism and nationalism, complicated by the sometimes liberating but often voyeuristic global popular culture in an attempts to negotiate a space for the female body in the age of economic and cultural globalization between feminism that celebrates it, nationalism that disciplines it and the flourishing global consumerism that profits from it.

It is my argument that the controversy of women authors, especially the contradiction between women and the nation/community, is discursively *produced* by literary and cultural criticism of limited theoretical framework. It is closely related to masculinist nationalist literary canon formation, and almost always goes hand in hand with the cultural production of a reductive notion of feminism. In a sense, the controversy of women authors of different geopolitical locations has much to do with the legitimacy of feminist discourses within that particular nation-space.

This project is my participation, as a feminist critic, of the cultural production of Chinese women authors as well as feminist criticism. The ambition of my project is to construct an alternative feminist framework of criticism so as to *un-produce* the controversy, to examine the mechanism of literary canon, and to re-energize feminism in these different nation spaces.

This project is also my contribution as an overseas Chinese to the mapping of transnational Chineseness, another contemporary controversy. “China” as an imagined community is marked by contradiction: its unstable national borders and its nationalist attempts to keep tight control of those borders. The mapping of Chineseness is thus a

transnational discursive project that requires the vision of a “transnational critic,” resisting both Eurocentric and Sinocentric imagination of “China” and Chineseness.

My inclusion of Taiwan and Hong Kong into the discussion certainly has to do with my Mainland-China background, but my goal here is not to construct a homogeneous Mainland-centered Chinese empire. On the contrary, it is to problematize and decenter with a comparative perspective on the development of nationalism in these three geopolitical locations. It is not only to present how Chineseness is being imagined and contested but also to illuminate intense negotiations, even oppositions, between the different locational nationalisms, particularly in relation to the traditionally and conservatively defined China, which is considered to have absolute right of sovereignty over Taiwan and Hong Kong. On many occasions I use the more specific term “Mainland” instead of the more ambiguous “China” that is still in contestation. I hope to keep that border open and flexible instead of drawing an absolute distinction between China, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

I also take the mapping of transnational Chineseness beyond this popular China/Mainland-Taiwan-Hong Kong triangular relations, the so-called “three locations across the Taiwan Strait (liang’an sandi),” and include Chinese America into this project. Of course, I have no intention to question Chinese/Asian American project to claim America, nor do I wish to invoke the Eurocentric interpellation of Chinese Americans (and other Asian Americans) as always already inassimilable aliens whose home is China or Asia. Rather, it is mostly inspired by the notion of Third World, defined by Chandra Mohanty, which refers to traditional Third World countries as well as people living in Third World conditions in the West.

This mapping is in addition my personal negotiation of national belonging as a recently naturalized Chinese American, who recognizes and accepts emotional and political ties to the imagined China. Not only am I aware of how China may impact my life directly or indirectly, but I also intend to influence the imagining of China with my research. This insider/outsider status grants me a unique perspective, and more importantly, privilege of freedom from authoritarian nationalist discourses in any locations, particularly in the thorny case of Mainland-Taiwan relations. On the other hand, I am fully aware of a possible power hierarchy (Chinese American/West vs. Chinese) as a result of this privilege.

“Introduction” presents the theoretical framework of this project, which is what I call the politics of literary/cultural criticism, inspired by Stanley Fish’s reader-response theories on interpretation as well as by Stuart Hall’s cultural studies theories on encoding and decoding. In other words, literary/cultural criticism is crucial, not just because it understands the author’s intended meanings. It is crucial because it actively and aggressively produces different and often times conflictary cultural and political significance of the text and the author. It is a politically powerful act and “a discourse of legitimation” in and beyond literary canon formation. What is at issue here is no longer some insignificant textual ambiguities but intense political struggles for the ultimate power to define cultural realities and traditions, a highly selective process involving inclusion or exclusion of certain cultural texts, reproduction or elimination of certain discourses, as well as maintenance or transformation of certain power structures.

To unproduce the controversy, I investigate the literary/cultural criticism that produces it, namely, the discourse of “representational inevitability,” a pervasive but

limited approach to Third World authors, an approach that holds that any Third World text inevitably represents the totality of Third World national or racial realities and Third World authors are spokespersons for their national or racial communities.

While other critics consider the discourse of “representational inevitability” as a natural result of racist and colonial history, I think this is simply another Eurocentric discursive construct by scholars of the West and the Third World, or China in this case. It is nationalistic and male centered. It promotes a canonical tokenism in the West, and relies on an essentialized notion of China as a fixed homogeneous Other as opposed to the West. Particularly it is about the legitimacy of heterosexual Chinese manhood. In this nationalist and masculinist Third World/Chinese contexts, Chinese women and their bodies, except as evidence to positive heterosexual male images, are neither representative of nor representable.

Thus we come to the theoretically constructed contradiction between women and nation in the controversy. It is in rigid male-centered nationalist discourses that feminism is appropriated and distorted as gender only and white only in China. Feminism is either just about gender and needs to be subsumed under nationalism, or more importantly, it is simply white or racist and needs to be resisted.

However, I do not hold some essentialist notion that feminism and nationalism are inherently contradictory. Rather, the feminist-nationalist tension is located within specific historical contexts, in which both feminism and nationalism are constructed and both are constructed in such ways as to contradict each other. In other words, the tension is a nonstop negotiation between feminism and nationalism, between feminist desires and national imaginations.

Besides historicizing the feminist-nationalist oppositions and negotiations, I point out the significant role of the flourishing global popular culture in the cultural production of the controversial women authors. While acknowledging the positive impact of popular culture which often challenges the rigidity of authoritarian nationalist discourses in different geopolitical Chinese locations, particularly on the issue of sexuality, I emphasize that this revolution (if it can be called revolution) of the popular is rather limited, for it is motivated not by some political commitment to social change but by the desire to profit. It is voyeuristic, and often Eurocentric.

To unproduce the controversy of women authors of color, I suggest a new feminist literary/cultural criticism that shifts from the rigidity of representational inevitability to the more flexible concept of cultural production. On the one hand, differently located Chinese women authors do not “represent” a preconceived national totality, but they “produce” part of complex, fluid, and constantly changing realities, which do not simply exist, but are put into existence through language and discourses. On the other hand and more significantly, feminist critics (myself included), through reading controversial women authors of color, actively “produce” the cultural significance of the authors, the political mapping of the nation, as well as the definition of feminism.

To re-energize feminism, I draw upon Virginia Woolf’s notion of “Outsiders’ Society” and argue that feminism must be envisioned outside rigid nationalist discourses, Eurocentric or Sinocentric, in order to keep its critical edge in the production of a Chineseness.

My selections of specific authors and their texts are determined by their literary, social and political impact within their national locations, and the controversy has much to do with the critical project of defining national literature and literary canon. Maxine Hong Kingston of Chinese America and the publication of *The Woman Warrior* coincide with the Asian American cultural nationalist movements, and her controversy has shed light on the mechanism of Eurocentric American literary canon formation as well as on the construction of Asian American literature. Similarly, the Wei Hui phenomenon of Mainland China is not simply a controversy on the individual author but an intensified continuation of the debate on contemporary Chinese literature. It is intimately related to the production of a new-generation urban authors as well as the construction of a new-generation readers nationwide.

I choose Li Ang from the geopolitical location of Taiwan not only for the reason that Li Ang has always been a controversial woman author but more significantly for the reason that she is unique and influential. Women authors before her have not caused as much social and political impacts in contemporary Taiwan while younger women authors have not offered anything new or different. While fully aware of the different forms of nationalisms constructed by different groups of people, I focus on oppositional Taiwan-centered nationalism as a deliberate distancing from Sinocentrism. This is another reason that I select Li Ang, who is involved in oppositional nationalist movements.

The choice of Li Bihua of Hong Kong similarly is connected to how Hong Kong literature is delineated and how Hong Kong identities are imagined, particularly in relation to Chineseness.

I start the discussion of specific controversies with Maxine Hong Kingston in Chapter 1 for the reason that it serves as a blueprint for the understanding of the controversies of women authors from other Chinese communities. The controversy of Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* has become a classic debate between feminism and cultural nationalism, applicable to women of color in and beyond the United States. A great deal of research has done on Kingston and the controversy, but many only stops at Kingston or the debate itself. For me, revisiting the debate of the past is only meaningful if it sheds light to the development of feminist criticism today. Focusing on the problematic canonization of the Chinese American female body, I argue that Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is an imagination for a Chinese American heroine, who must develop her individuality outside her repressive community in order to come back to transform and remap it, which is what Kingston has done.

Chapter 2 analyzes the phenomenon of Wei Hui in Mainland China, the commercial success and the final ban of her novel *Shanghai Baby*. It investigates the emergence of Beauty Writers and hot (or cool) criticisms as a result of the rising commercial popular culture, and explores the ambiguity and danger of female sexuality embodied in the new-generation urban female author who distances from nationalist discourses, flirts with popular culture, and fully embraces anything Western. The ban of Wei Hui's book is directly related to the overwhelmingly negative attacks by literary and cultural critics, deeply rooted in revolutionary nationalism. It reveals the dead-end predicament of sex-phobic and homophobic contemporary Chinese nationalist feminism, protected and completely consumed by the nationalist discourse.

Chapter 3 turns to Li Ang, a veteran controversial author of Taiwan and her 1997 *The Beigang Incense Urn*, focusing on her negotiation between feminism and nationalism in oppositional movement against KMT dictatorship. I first deconstruct the media production of the Beigang Incense Urn Incident as “a war between two women” for the love of one man, which reduces Li Ang’s text to innuendo fiction concerning whether she represents or misrepresents the truth of the female representative involved. I consider Li Ang’s insider/outsider position a perfect example of feminist negotiation between nation and nationalism. In other words, she identifies with Taiwan, an insider, but is critical of the oppositional and almost mainstream Taiwanese nationalism. She breaks down the rigid boundaries between the progressive Taiwanese and reactive Mainlander and deliberately sexualize nationalist politics with three narratives of the female body: the Grieving Mother of the Nation, the Lustful Widow and the Unrestrained Woman.

Chapter 4 discusses the popularity of Li Bihua, a Hong Kong popular novelist, columnist, and film/TV screenwriter. Exploring such serious issues as national identity, gender and sexuality in rather conventional love/romance plots, she is popular among both the general public and literary and cultural critics. Li Bihua is symbolic of Hong Kong, transformed from a cultural desert to a legitimate unique popular culture that embraces flexibility and resists rigid notion of nationalism. The controversy of Li Bihua is closely related to the delineation of Hong Kong literature, namely whether it should include the popular. Li Bihua is a pioneer in constructing a literary Hong Kong consciousness, but I argue that she is also critical of Hong Kong as an alternative space. The contradiction of her female characters—strong and conventional—is her way to imagine outside China-centered or Hong Kong nationalist discourses. It is in the

conventional love/romance that nationalist boundaries are transgressed, and individuality is acknowledged.

This project grows out of my firm belief that feminist knowledge production is a form of activism. It is my personal negotiation of my own in-betweenness, and it is also my intervention as an overseas Chinese feminist in the cultural production of the nation and women authors. It is my subjective production of differently located Chinese feminisms and nationalisms in the hope to accentuate the flexibility of both terms and to illuminate the critical development of feminist criticism.

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Introduction The Cultural Production of Controversy: Feminism, Women Authors, and the Mapping of China

How do we negotiate a space for the female body in the age of economic and cultural globalization between feminism that celebrates it, nationalism that disciplines it and the flourishing global consumerism that profits from it? While the female body has enjoyed more freedom as a result of rapid development of feminism, economic and cultural globalization engenders a rise in conservative nationalism, encouraged and supported ironically by the recently popular post-colonial theories, against Western values sweeping all over the world. More than ever in the Euroamericentric male-dominated world, the female body has become a site for power struggle between feminists, nationalists, capitalists and neo-colonialists. And more than ever, Third World women or women of color¹ feel trapped in a dilemma between feminism, (racial or cultural) nationalism and neocolonialism, a dilemma complicated by the sometimes liberating yet voyeuristic, even pornographic, global popular culture.

For a long time, Third World women authors have had to choose between the feminist cause and the nationalist cause in the ambitious project of nation-building against cultural imperialism and neocolonialism. They are often confronted, particularly at times of national or racial crises, with questions like, “Which is more important to you, to be a woman or to be a Chinese/Black/Asian/etc.?” With their exposures and critiques of various forms of sexism within their racial/national communities, they are frequently accused of misrepresenting racial/national realities and selling out or betraying their race or nation, thus perpetuating the racial/national (male) stereotypes as the primitive,

backward and exotic Other vis-à-vis the white man who embodies civilization, truth and all other things that spell superiority. As a result, Third World women often find themselves stuck in unproductive and negative cultural debates. While I welcome the critical energy stemming out of literary and cultural debates, I also see the danger of this seemingly endless attacks and defenses between feminists and (cultural) nationalists, who are more interested in accusation than solutions without even questioning the legitimacy of the debate. It seems that critics have equated nationalism—“a political principle”²—with nation—“an imagined community,”³ taking for granted a conflicted relationship between women and the nation/community when the contradiction is actually between feminism and (cultural) nationalism. As a result, the controversy continues with its own mechanism of nonstop absorbing and recycling, and we lose sight of our ultimate goal to transform the overarching hierarchical systems of power—particularly gender, race and ethnicity—that start the whole mess in the first place.

It is my argument that the controversy of Third World women authors, especially the contradiction between women and nation/community, is culturally and historically *produced*, as much by their works as by literary and cultural criticism of limited theoretical paradigms. It is also my argument that this controversy almost always goes hand in hand with the cultural production of an often reductive and distorted version of feminism. It is my ambition to *un-produce* the controversy through an alternative feminist framework of criticism beyond current theoretical entrapments. Focusing on four controversial contemporary women authors at different Chinese locations, this project emphasizes a politics of literary criticism, which is essential to the making of textual and cultural meanings. The goal is not just to provide a different feminist production of the

texts by women authors of color, but it is also to participate in the cultural production of feminist discourses. It is to bring attention to the often neglected negative representation of feminism in contemporary culture and to revise the feminist project in such a way as to detangle feminist critics from theoretically produced dilemmas.

First, I define a politics of literary and cultural criticism, drawing upon Stanley Fish's idea of "interpretive strategy,"⁴ Patrocinio Schweickart's "feminist theory of reading,"⁵ and above all Stuart Hall's famous concept of cultural "encoding/decoding."⁶ In other words, reading is crucial not because it understands an author's intended meaning. It is crucial because it actively and aggressively produces different and often times conflictary cultural and political meanings of the text and the author. To understand the controversies of women authors of color, we thus need to read and investigate those readings that construct the controversies.

Second, focusing on the various readings of controversial women authors of color, I deconstruct the notion of "representational inevitability,"⁷ a pervasive but seriously flawed reading practice that reduces creative texts to documents on the social, cultural or political conditions of their racial or national communities, while serving as a discursive control of the West over the Third World, and of a masculinist nation over feminist desires.

The last step is to unproduce the controversies of women authors of color through a new feminist framework of reading beyond "representational inevitability." On the one hand, women authors of color do not represent some fixed national or racial condition but *produce* part of the constantly changing realities. On the other, the controversies are not contradictions between women and the nation, but tensions between feminist and

nationalist discourses, complicated by the rise of popular culture that turns everything into commodity. Recognizing and resisting the cultural production of an oversimplified and reductive notion of feminism, I argue that feminism must be envisioned from outside, not of the nation but of (masculinist) nationalist discourses, in order to maintain its critical edge. It is of great necessity that feminist critics resist male-centered nationalist “unreal loyalties” such as patriotism⁸ and keep their independent position as “outsiders,” a notion much inspired by Virginia Woolf’s “Outsiders’ Society”⁹

While women authors of color produce for their audiences one of the many realities of their culture and tradition, various critics continue that cultural production through their interpretations, producing meanings and images of women authors of color and the in/significance of the female body. Reading is thus political and practical. It is through reading that realities of gender, race and nation are “coded,” borrowing the term from Stuart Hall, into being.¹⁰ It is also through reading that cultural and national traditions have been produced, reproduced, contested and revised. Consequently, it is extremely critical for feminist critics not only to read women authors of color but to read in such a framework as to un-produce the controversies of women authors of color and of the female body.

The Politics of Literary/Cultural Criticism

It is literary and cultural criticisms, not creative works being critiqued, that have produced the current debates on women authors of color. Reading does not just interpret but produces textual meanings and the author’s intentions. It is a politically powerful act and “a discourse of legitimation” beyond literary canon formation.¹¹ It directly

participates in the cultural productions of nation, race, gender, and sexuality.

The significance of literary interpretation is greatly emphasized in reader-response theories, and Stanley Fish's notion of "interpretation" makes the reader *the* producer of a text. According to Fish, reading is "interpretive" in the sense that it is "regarded, not as leading to meaning, but as *having* meaning." In other words, it does not "[wait] meaning, but [constitutes] meaning."¹² As a result of different readers employing different interpretive strategies, textual ambiguities and controversies emerge. On the other hand, "interpretive strategies are not natural or universal, but learned" within "interpretive communities," "made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around."¹³

Fish's theory opens up a vast space for political reading. His notion of "interpretive communities" establishes a direct relation between textual meaning, the reader, and the cultural context. That is, the text is fluid, its different meanings determined by readers with different specific social, cultural and political backgrounds. Its emphasis on the "learned" process of reading leads to the possibility to unlearn and thus to challenge dominant prejudiced criticism, which is exactly what Patrocinio Schweickart does when she argues for "a feminist theory of reading"¹⁴ to revise the male-centered literary canon. Schweickart asserts that feminist critics, in order to succeed, must fight "for the development of the reading strategies" with "a community of women readers who are qualified by experience, commitment, and training."¹⁵ Instead of learning

to be “immasculated” or reading as a man, the female reader must “[take] control of the reading experience” and “[read] the text as it was not meant to be read, in fact, reading it against itself.”¹⁶ Schweickart rightly points out that reader-response theories mostly ignores differences among readers in race, class, to which she responds with a feminist reading theory that focuses on the female reader. However, she does not see any connection between gender and other social and cultural factors, although her structure of reading is still helpful to later feminist critics who wish to take into account other social and cultural issues such as race and nationality.

While Fish and Schweickart limit their arguments within textual space, Stuart Hall takes a step further in his enlightening essay “Encoding, Decoding,” which accentuates reading as politically and ideologically invested discourses that produce our understanding of the material realities. In other words, the realities we know are discursively constructed and are constantly encoded and decoded. As he puts it,

[r]ealities exist outside language, but it is constantly mediated by and through language: and what we can know and say has to be produced in and through discourse. Discursive ‘knowledge’ is the product not of the transparent representation of the ‘real’ in language but of the articulation of language on real relations and conditions.”¹⁷

Hall recognizes how dominant ideologies impact the process of encoding and decoding, and presents three different structures of reading: the dominant-hegemonic coding that reproduces and maintains social and political status quo, the negotiated reading that understands preferred dominant codes while offering some different interpretations, and the oppositional reading in which the reader “detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference,”¹⁸ thus deconstructing dominant discourses.

Hall's argument is illuminating at two levels. At the textual level, Hall recognizes multiplicity and flexibility of meanings of a text, and emphasizes the determining power of decoding or criticism in the production of meanings, despite intended encoding of the author. In this sense, the author's intended message is irrelevant. Or, it is only as relevant as one of the many different literary and cultural criticisms on the same work. At the more important cultural level, Hall pinpoints the enormous power—political and ideological—invested in the different modes of reading. Literary and cultural criticism has become powerful discourses shaping our realities and our sense of the realities, or in Lydia Liu's words, it is “a discourse of legitimation.”¹⁹ What is at issue here is no longer some insignificant textual ambiguities but intense political struggles for the ultimate power to define cultural realities and traditions, a highly selective process involving inclusion or exclusion of certain cultural texts, reproduction or elimination of certain discourses, as well as maintenance or transformation of certain power structures.

Controversial women authors of color are culturally produced in this context of discursive competition between feminism, nationalism, and consumerism. This controversy is simply part of the “mechanism of culture,” a concept developed by Yuriy Lotman and B.A. Uspensky. Culture “as a long-term memory of the community” is formed through remembering and forgetting, by “fixing certain events which are translatable into elements of the text and forgetting others, marked as nonessential. In this sense every text furthers not only the remembering process, but forgetting as well.”²⁰ It is always defined against “nonculture” within the same community and in opposition to “anticulture”—any other culture—between communities.²¹ Although culture resists major changes, it has from time to time “a new moment” when new texts are created and old

texts are abandoned. In this sense, the controversy of women authors of color can be interpreted as “a new moment” waiting to happen. Its outcome determines whether these authors and their writings should be remembered or forgotten, and it also leads to an even more important question about whether feminist criticism is culturally legitimate.

It is thus crucial for feminist critics to not only read controversial texts in a new way, but to envision a strong feminism to identify the politics of literary and cultural criticisms. Hall’s three modes of reading acknowledge the possibilities of interpretation beyond the limitation of dualism while Fish’s notion of “interpretive communities” shows even more flexibility in capturing the different discursive interpretations that have produced the controversies. Recognizing the complicated and fluid power relations among different interpretive communities, this project is a feminist cultural production of the debates on women authors of color. It decodes the different discourses practiced and reproduced in the debates, challenges dominant discursive appropriation and control of feminisms and women authors of color, and produces alternative meanings for the controversial texts.

Representational Inevitability vs. Cultural Production: The Root of the Controversies

The controversy of women authors of color is centered on these authors’ mis/representation of the racial or national communities as well as on the critics’ mis/interpretation of the texts. The root of the controversy on women authors of color is “representational inevitability,” a common but very limited approach to authors of color. According to David Leiwei Li in his discussion of literary criticism on ethnic writers in

the United States, a special author-community relationship exists between an ethnic writer and the ethnic community as a result of historical “underrepresentation” and “involuntary representation,” which have produced a simultaneous “lack” of artistic and cultural presence *and* “abundance” of imposed stereotypes. Therefore, Li states “[t]hat a piece of ethnic literature is deemed exemplary and its author designated a community spokesperson provides the basic context in which works of minority art are received.”²²

In such a “basic context” of reception for authors of color, the ultimate question is whether a particular author of color *represents or misrepresents* the social and cultural realities of his or her national or racial community. Women authors of color often challenge prejudices, particularly on the issue of gender, within their national or racial spaces, and they are therefore caught in the representational trap. On the one hand, they are hailed by feminists, some of whom are prejudiced, for their triumphant “truthful” representation of racial and national spaces, while on the other, they are accused of conforming to racist ideologies and distorting national or racial realities to “make the white audience feel good.”²³

While David Li and other critics may consider this “basic context” a natural result of racist history, I argue that this “basic context” in itself is a racist and sexist construct that should be challenged. “Representational inevitability” is an Orientalist discursive construct that results from, supports and reproduces the power hierarchies of the West over the Third World, and of masculinity over femininity. Literary criticism confined to the inevitability of representation is nationalist and male-centered.²⁴ It serves as a discursive tool of control and discipline, and becomes a “reality show” on nationalist masculinity competition, embodied by the regulation of the female body in the debate on

women authors of color.

The problem of “representational inevitability” lies in a theoretical confusion of literariness with ethnicity, adopted by both Western and Third World scholars concerning Third World literature. It equates literary representation by Third World authors with actualities of the Third World. Rey Chow names this problem “the coersiveness of the typical mimeticism between representation and ethnicity” and says

No matter how nonmimetic, experimental, subversive or avant-garde such diasporic writing might try to be, it is invariably classified, marketed and received in the West as Chinese, in a presupposed correspondence to that reality called China. As in the case of representations by all minorities in the West, a kind of paternalistic, if not downright racist, attitude persists as a method of categorizing minority discourse: minorities are allowed the right to speak only on the implicit expectation that they will speak in the documentary mode, “reflecting” the group from which they come.²⁵

Literary texts by authors of color thus are not explored as works of art but are interpreted as transparent reports on the social realities of a people other than the West. The significance of such a text lies purely in its social and political merits while its artistic value, if any, is negligible except to serve as a means to achieve that social function. In fact, the text *is* the reality of Third World nations. Or more accurately, literary criticism of this framework turns the text into a reality of the Third World. This framework of literary criticism is not unlike Fredric Jameson’s observation on Third World literature. In his classic and controversial essay “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” he makes his famous declaration that “all third-world texts are necessarily . . . allegorical, and in a very specific way they are to be read as... **national** allegories.”²⁶ Fredric Jameson is not the first to link Third World literature to the concept of nation, but he certainly helps to solidify this link that reproduces and is a product of unequal power

relations between the West and the Third World.

Behind the discourse of “representational inevitability” is a constructed cultural superiority of the West over the Third World, assumed by many Western scholars and internalized by many Third World researchers. In the first place, the relation between the West and the Third World is that of theory and experience. That is, scholarships concerning Western cultures often assume universality whereas those dealing with Third World cultures have to spell out their national or ethnic specificities, as Rey Chow points out, even when theoretical issues are explored. As a result, such studies are considered “too narrow or specialized to warrant general interest.”²⁷ Similarly, Western literature is considered to be capable of exploring all aspects of humanities as well as aesthetic development in general, while Third World literature is fixed within limited time and space.

This theoretical approach reproduces an essentialized, exoticized, and necessarily inferior Third World culture, denying diversity, fluidity and sophistication accorded to the West. It is also a part of the Orientalist tradition Edward Said discusses. Said illustrates vividly the sometimes dangerous power of the critics, especially those in academia who publish texts “purporting to contain knowledge about something actual.” In other words, Western critics and scholars “can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe.”²⁸ The discourse of “representational inevitability,” with its explicit equation of literary representation with Third World realities, makes the constructed inferiority of Third World realities even more real. Just as the Orient in Orientalist discourses exists to demonstrate Western superiority, the “represented” realities of Third World perpetuate the hierarchy between the West and the Third World.

It is in this sense that literary criticism is not simply “nation-oriented” as Lydia Liu argues,²⁹ but it is largely nationalistic. In containing Third World literature in nationalist discourses while crediting Western literature with multi-dimensional qualities, literary criticism of the West declares victory of the Western nations.

Western scholars are not the only critics who are responsible for this cultural hierarchy between the West and the Third World, however. Many Third World scholars, while recognizing this problem, have been confined in the same discourse of “representational inevitability” and played their role in essentializing their ethnic or national culture. Although positive images are strongly promoted to counter negative images of Orientalist tradition, these scholars deny, just like Western scholars, complexity and fluidity of their cultures, excluding or forbidding any literary representation other than those serving nationalist purposes. Instead of challenging the discourse of “representational inevitability,” they internalize a sense of “subalternity”³⁰—feeling of inferiority—and are in fact more sensitive about the question of representation and much more concerned with representational legitimacy of certain literary works. The ethnic or national space, thus produced and reproduced, is still fixed and unchangeable. The same hierarchical structure of power is employed although the positions of the West and Third World are switched. Literary criticism therefore becomes an integral part of nationalist discourses in the Third World.

“Representational inevitability” serves as a discursive control of the literary canon and Third World. It works closely with a similar Orientalist tokenism in canon formation, which David Leiwei Li argues is “the hidden mechanism of a ‘canonical quota.’”³¹ While the “canonical quota” may be a step forward from the previous total erasure, it makes

sure that only a couple of Third World literary works are included. The theoretical equation of literariness with ethnicity makes justifiable to include just one literary work from a specific ethnic group, since this one work is enough to represent “the whole humanity of its people in culture and politics.”³² On the other hand, canonical tokenism in turn promotes and encourages the equation of literary representation with actualities of Third World nations and ethnicities, since the included one or few are the only available cultural text(s). This theoretical mechanism imposes impossible political and cultural burdens that “no single work is capable of performing under any condition”³³ and certainly limits the variety of critical interpretations on these literary works.

A tool to maintain the hierarchy of power between the Third World and the West, the discourse of “representational inevitability” is not only nationalistic but also ultimately male-centered, which depends much on the control of women, especially women’s bodies.³⁴ Underlying the question whether women authors of color represent or misrepresent their ethnic communities is a discursive competition between Western Orientalist nationalism and Third World nationalism for the power to control the hierarchical structure of cultural relations between races and nations. In addition, it is essentially a competition between Western masculinity and Third World masculinity, both of which are necessarily heterosexual. As a result, their power and victory has much to do with their in/ability to define the meanings of Third World women’s bodies. However, this is not a level competition from the beginning. The burden of the Third World inferiority to the Western superiority is fully embodied in the discursive trap of “representational inevitability,” often putting Third World critics on the defensive. Not

questioning the assumed superiority of the Western men, they are trying to prove their just-as-good worthiness. While it is women authors of color who are in the middle of cultural controversies, the real controversy is actually about the legitimacy and status of Third World manhood as opposed to that of the Western men.

This is exactly why controversial authors of color are not necessarily women. Male authors are also faced with the accusation of cultural misrepresentation as long as their works do not promote some positive images of nationalistic masculinity. Two male authors come into mind. David Huang, author of *M. Butterfly* is criticized for feminizing and castrating Asian American men for one simply reason. His created main character not only fails to attract women to prove his heroic masculinity, but he becomes the “woman” in his long-term relationship with the French male diplomat. Although he is heroic as a spy working hard for his country, his love affair with another man makes him a traitor of heroism. Yes, he has spied successfully, but alas, he is no longer a real man. On the other hand, how would we look at James Bond, the ultimate spy, if he decided to sleep with men instead of women as he always does?

Another example is Ha Jin, whose award-winning *Waiting*, a novel written in English about China, draws fire from some Chinese critics, with the “natural” consequence of a ban on its Chinese translation. *Waiting* tells about a military doctor vacillating between his arranged marriage and his love affair, between his wife with bound feet and his nurse girlfriend. The story shows the absurdity of life in China, but focuses more on the weakness of human nature, embodied by the doctor. Therefore, the book definitely does not promote positive male images. Interestingly, the criticism is not on the male doctor but on his wife, whose bounded feet are questioned. According to the

argument, the wife could not have had her feet bounded in the context of the novel since it is already banned when she is growing up. As a result, the only reason that Ha Jin puts this information in the story is to create a negative sensation about China in order to please the American readers.³⁵ The dispute on the wife's bounded feet is not really about whether the wife's image is positive or negative, but that her bounded feet shows the primitive, barbaric and backward state of Chinese men.

With that acknowledged, women authors are more likely to find themselves accused of misrepresentation of national realities simply because many of them are less interested in manhood than in women's issues. Although it is possible that a woman's story leads to a celebration of masculinity (as in many popular romance novels), it is more likely that the quest for a female self disrupts and subverts gender hierarchy. Within the male-centered nationalistic discourse of "representational inevitability," it is not surprising to find women authors as outsiders of the masculine nation: they cannot legitimately represent national masculinity; nor are they part of it except as evidence to masculine superiority. In other words, they are neither representative nor representable. Naturally in this context, the best compliment to a woman author would be that she writes like a man, hence the paradox that a woman author is worthy of critical attention only when she ceases to be a woman.

This problem is certainly not limited to women authors of color. Of course, there is a power hierarchy between Western women and Third World women, and ironically, Third World women are marked with their nationality when they are outside their national space. Rey Chow is right to point out that Western feminists can write about universal subjects such as "women" and "gender" whereas Third World women have to

spell out their specific geopolitical locations. Nevertheless, Western feminists are entitled to expertise only on women whereas Western men can talk about any subject in and out of their nations and this world. Consequently, although feminism has developed rapidly globally, the space of nation is still shaped largely by masculine nationalistic discourses. It has been the rule and is sometimes still acceptable in courses on American or Chinese literature to teach only male “masters” but it is almost unthinkable to focus such courses only on female authors. It seems that women can only be accepted if they accept female inferiority, necessary to the essentialized hierarchy of masculinity over femininity.

The male-centered nationalistic discourse of representational inevitability is ultimately a masculine competition dependent on a control of femininity. To argue whether one particular Third World woman author represents or misrepresents her national community does not really solve the problem. If she truthfully represents her community, hooray for the Western men now that they have proof of their superiority; and if she misrepresents, good job for Third World men now that there is no evidence of their inferiority. Whatever the result, the same hierarchy stands. It is energy consuming and waste since the question of mis/representation becomes a hoop that each woman author of color has to jump through, still trapped in that gender/nation split. Although she is at the center of the debate, it is not really about her. The discourse of representational inevitability feeds on an essentialized notion of nation and gender and in turn reproduces them, maintaining hierarchies between gender and ethnicities. In a word, the discourse of representational inevitability creates the guilt trap and the split between women and the nation.

Since it is unproductive to argue case by case whether a particular woman author of color represents or misrepresents her communities, it is necessary to deconstruct the discursive controversy, abandoning representational inevitability as a reading practice as well as the representational relationship between third world authors and third world national communities. Instead of focusing on the question of misrepresentation based on a fixed racial or national reality, I suggest that critics look at literary texts as “productions” of complex, fluid, and constantly changing realities, which do not simply exist, but are put into existence through language and discourses. Of course, there is no inherent or necessary connection between literary texts and the nation: it is just one of the many theoretical approaches to literary texts, particularly making sense to scholars of comparative literary and cultural studies in which the issue of the nation and national differences (and similarities) are tackled. Jameson’s concept of Third World texts as “national allegories” is inappropriate not because it interprets Third World texts as stories about nations but in that it creates an essentialized Third World nation thus contributing to the political and cultural hierarchy of the West over the rest of the world. In fact, Jameson’s “national allegories” can still be useful if we envision beyond the “essentialist” viewpoints on the nation. That is, there have never been any fixed national cultures and realities. Instead, the nation is “coded” (in Stuart Hall’s term) into existence and is always under constant construction, deconstruction and reconstruction via language and texts by writers and critics.

Nation is narrated into existence. The connection between cultural/literary texts and the consciousness of national belonging is clearly illustrated in Benedict Anderson’s now classic term “imagined community.” According to Anderson, nation is “an imagined

political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”³⁶ National consciousness is directly related to the development of a print language that enables, for the first time, people to communicate and understand each other although they speak differently. However, the “imagined community” is political, meaning that the consciousness of nation is created, reinforced and disseminated with a print language through cultural texts that serve certain political purposes.³⁷ National consciousness is therefore not fixed but constructed. In other words, the fixation of national consciousness is constructed and imagined, and so it can be reconstructed and transformed. Although Anderson emphasizes similarities in the form of ‘a deep, horizontal comradeship,’ he admits the existence of “inequality and exploitation” in each “imagined community,”³⁸ which leaves room for later critics to develop the theme of difference—unequal power relations and political tensions—within the space of nation. As Homi Bhabha says, the nation is “a space that is internally marked by cultural difference and the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities, and tense cultural locations.”³⁹

Bhabha believes that the nation is “a form of cultural elaboration” and an agency of ambivalent narration that holds culture at its most productive position, as a force for ‘subordination, fracturing, diffusing, reproducing, as much as producing, creating, forcing, guiding.’⁴⁰ He emphasizes the ambivalent nature of the nation with its nonstop formation and transgression of boundaries and suggests “invok[ing] the ambivalent margin of the nation-space:”

To reveal such a margin is, in the first instance, to contest claims to cultural supremacy, whether these are made from the ‘old’ post-imperialist metropolitan nations, or on behalf of the ‘new’ independent nations of the periphery. The marginal or ‘minority’ is not the space of a celebratory, or utopian, self-marginalization. It is a much more substantial intervention into those justifications of modernity—progress, homogeneity, cultural organicism,

the deep nation, the long past—that rationalize the authoritarian, ‘normalizing’ tendencies within cultures in the name of the national interest or the ethnic prerogative. In this sense, then, the ambivalent, antagonistic perspective of nation as narration will establish the cultural boundaries of the nation so that they may be acknowledged as ‘containing’ thresholds of meaning that must be crossed, erased, and translated in the process of cultural production.⁴¹

The “imagined community” called nation is “heterogeneous” against hegemonic homogeneous culture promoted by dualistic Eurocentrism or Third World nationalism. On the one hand, it fights hegemony as part of the center/margin dichotomy; and on the other, its promise of border crossing suggests cultural fluidity and multiplicity beyond dualistic view of the nation as center versus margin.

Nobody or no narration can represent the totality of the nation without resorting to “cultural supremacy.” Each narration only *produces* a part, sometimes a small part, of the flexible and changing whole. Women authors of color in their fiction have produced, rather than represented, certain national realities that may resemble or differ from realities familiar to other writers, critics and readers. Feminist narrations definitely oppose to masculine hegemony maintained in the name of the community, but they do not necessarily compete against other narrations in order to be the next discursive winner. It is more accurate to consider the different narrations of nation as a political dialogue on nation building, each participant complementary to the others. On the other hand, literary/cultural critics, feminists and nationalists included, with the publication of their theories and criticisms, have been active and aggressive producers of knowledge on the different national realities *and* the different realities of the authors and their fictional texts. Similarly, different narrations in the form of criticism are not inherently exclusive of each other as long as critics reject simplistic dichotomous imagination of the nation. However, I cannot emphasize enough that the notion of multiple, changing,

complementary national narrations is not to take away the critical edge of criticism, especially feminist criticism, but to accentuate it. It is precisely the pervasiveness of dualistic literary and cultural criticism that makes the feminist critical edge a necessity. It is precisely the feminist critical edge that will envision beyond dualistic hierarchies of power. There have never been “pure” national cultural realities: they have always been “coded,” “edited,” and mediated while constantly being produced, reproduced, revised, and transformed by writers, critics and the general public.

The Cultural Production of the Nation: Feminism, Nationalism, and the Female Body

The opposition between women and the nation is discursively produced. Feminism is not against the concept of the nation or national belonging. However, feminism is against the discourse of nationalism that excludes, alienates, and even prosecutes anyone who does not conform to its narrowly defined and tightly controlled homogeneous national body. The controversy on Third World women authors is really a critical debate between feminism and masculinist nationalism. It is an attempt of nationalist discourses to control the female body and to regulate feminism, especially how it is defined, so as to silence women’s voices, to appropriate and eliminate feminist movements, to restore gender hierarchy, and to accentuate the heterosexual masculine as the legitimate national representative.

Nation and nationalism are often discussed simultaneously as if they are interchangeable. However, there is much difference between the two terms. In fact, they can be quite opposite of each other in that nation embraces multiple and flexible

meanings whereas nationalism demands the domination of one meaning over other “less significant” meanings, which are at the same times suppressed or even eliminated. Nation as an “imagined community” is a space that includes differences and possibilities for different people working out their often unequal power relations. Although Anderson’s definition of this “imagined community” is “limited” within borders, these national borders are likewise fluid since they are also imagined and constructed. On the other hand, nationalism is “a theory of political legitimacy.”⁴² It includes but more significantly excludes, for its purpose is to regulate strictly ethnic boundaries. Moreover, the sense of nationalist belonging or “ethnic affinity” has at all times been affected by “one’s conception of what is correct and proper and, above all, of what affects the individual’s sense of honour and dignity,” which are sustained by “[t]he conviction of the excellence of one’s own customs and the inferiority of alien ones.”⁴³ In brief, nationalism is a political discourse founded upon and contributing to hierarchies within and outside its national space.

The maintenance of ethnic boundaries is intimately linked to regulations of gender relations. Or to put it more accurately, ethnic border patrol depends on the gender hierarchy of masculinity over femininity. Asian American critic Rachel Lee finds that “[t]oo often, challenges to race-based oppression takes as unproblematic the inequality between the sexes, seeing it as natural, or based on biological differences.” Lee concludes that “gender opposition, gender difference, and gender hierarchy become convenient ways for understanding, enacting, and reinforcing opposition, difference, and hierarchy more generally and in an array of social relationships criss-crossed by racial, class-based,

regional, and national differences.”⁴⁴ This is not surprising since Third World nationalism, including cultural nationalisms of ethnic minorities in the West (particularly in the United States), is largely an attempt to recover, re-imagine and rebuild manhood of color, as opposed to the traditionally more desirable Western/White masculinity. Third World men, in the post-colonial era, are “the real actors in nationalist productions” who can at last protect and “[defend] their freedom, their honor, their homeland, their families and their women.”⁴⁵ Ironically, women of color, who are supposed to be protected in the competition of nationalistic masculinities, protect through their complete submission. Understandably, they respond to the call to fight along with their men against racial, ethnic or national prejudices and independence, and they return, or are forced to return, to domesticity after revolutionary victories. And it is extremely important that women should not venture out of that “protected” and fenced space.

The pursuit of legitimate and desirable manhood and masculinity for men of color cannot be accomplished without the regulation of racialized and ethnicized sexuality. In *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality*, Joane Nagel argues that sex matters in constructing and imagining race, ethnicity and the nation:

The territories that lie at the intersections of racial, ethnic, or national boundaries are ethnosexual frontiers—erotic locations and exotic destinations that are surveilled and supervised, patrolled and policed, regulated and restricted, but that are constantly penetrated by individuals forging sexual links with ethnic Others across ethnic borders. Ethnosexual frontiers are the borderlands on either side of ethnic divides, they skirt the edges of ethnic communities; they constitute symbolic and physical sensual spaces where sexual imaginings and sexual contact occur between members of different racial, ethnic, and national groups.⁴⁶

Sexual boundaries are very much part of the ethnic, racial and national boundaries.

Paradoxically, the establishment of the boundaries with the purpose to control

ethnosexual activities in order to protect ethnic honor also invites sexual transgression across ethnic and national borders. Since nationalist discourses are male-centered and masculinity is only meaningful in relation to femininity, it is little surprise that the mapping of masculinist nationalist sexual boundaries very much depends on the imagination of femininity and female sexuality.

At the center of these cultural debates between feminism and nationalism is thus the female body. Asian American critic Leslie Bow clearly explains, with her concept of “rhetoric of allegiance,” the connection between women’s bodies and male-centered national identities. As she puts it, “ethnic and national affiliations are determined in part by conflicts over how sexuality is performed, potentially situating the female body as a register of international and domestic political struggle, as a site of national divisions and loyalties.” In her discussion of Asian American women’s literature, Bow considers Asian American female sexuality as “the sign of acculturation” and “Americanization” in opposition to “ethnic loyalty.”⁴⁷ In other words, women, whether they are sexual or not, are guilty of disloyalty unless proved innocent. To rescue themselves from ethnic dishonor and shame, they are expected to cleanse themselves of dangerous female sexuality and chain it up to the more sacred heterosexist nationalist masculinity. However, what is often forgotten is the fact that ethnic dishonor and shame are not on women who control their own sexuality, but on men who have “lost” control of *their* women’s bodies to other men, particularly Western men. The only way out for women in this context is thus to prioritize nationalist masculinity over their own selves and uphold faithfully the gender hierarchy: it guarantees honor for nationalistic Third World masculinity, whether in presence or absence of Western men.

Embedded in the discourses of (cultural) nationalism is the male gaze that treats women as sexual objects and properties without their own rights. While men of color are able to reconstruct their manhood in literary works, the female body has become more problematic in the sense that it has increasingly become a trophy-like object to be desired and owned by competing male-centered and racially different nationalist discourses. It serves nothing but to prove loyalty to and legitimacy of male sexuality, particularly male sexuality of its own ethnic and national communities. The female body is either contained within heterosexist nationalist discourses or deemed dangerous, evil or abnormal. It can be sexual only within whatever space allowed by nationalistic discourses. Otherwise, they will have to face the consequences of being the sexually perverse Other that needs to be disciplined and punished. In the process of imagining the nation and manhood, the female body is repressed, and portrayals of female sexuality are a most significant yardstick to judge the value of works by women authors of color. However, just as the sexual boundaries are meant to be crossed, the female body with its uncontrollable sexual desire also threatens to destabilize the constructed repressive “unity” of race, ethnicity and the nation.

The other side of the same coin is the regulation of male sexuality or homosexuality, to be exact. To say that nationalist discourses are male-centered does not mean one kind of masculinity for all as if all men were essentially the same, benefiting equally from gender hierarchy. Rather, nationalist discourses essentialize heterosexual masculinity, whose legitimacy entails repression and erasure of other forms of masculinity, particularly homosexuality, which is necessarily demonized. Two significant situations result from this. First, the hegemony of White heterosexual masculinity is

maintained with homosexualizing and hypersexualizing masculinities of color, which are both abnormal, either too much (as violent rapists in the case of African American and Hispanic American men) or too little (as sexually undesirable in the case of Asian American men). Second, the hegemony of Third World masculinity is constructed in de-homosexualization, which explains why some male authors are also labeled as ethnic traitors when male heterosexuality is not prioritized in their stories.

The battle over the female body is further complicated by the rise of popular culture in Third World. On the one hand, the popular culture flourishes as an alternative against sex-phobic authoritarian nationalist narrations. It provides a space for sexual exploration and expressions, and keeps pushing the limits, sometimes beyond heterosexuality. However, the popular culture is revolutionary, if it can be described as revolutionary, in a rather limited way. First of all, the rise of popular culture has much to do with rapid developments of the Eurocentric economic and cultural globalization. In this sense, what we call a revolutionary change may well be the victory of Western values over Third World traditions. While we should not underestimate positive effects out of cultural clashes as a result of globalization, we should also note the danger of substituting one hierarchy for the other.

On the other hand, the attention paid to sexuality is money-oriented. In other words, its demand for social change is motivated by a desire to profit, out of anything, sacred or not. This determines that the popular culture will not necessarily challenge but may be more likely to conform to nationalistic discourses, upon which its survival ultimately depends. Revolution, sexuality, the female body, and homosexuality are

nothing but commodities. The female body is not really free but in a voyeuristic gaze, which is often male-centered, heterosexist and nationalist.

It is when women authors of color depart from the “rhetoric of allegiance” that they become controversial. Sexism—often blatant in the form of sexual violence, within the ethnic and national space in works by women authors of color such as Alice Walker, Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston—has overshadowed other important issues tackled by the authors. Created in tales of rape, domestic violence, and verbal abuse suffered by women and young girls, “Negative images” of men of color attract the attention of mainstream feminism that, in the name of universal sisterhood, continues consciously or unconsciously the tradition of racism against men of color. On the other hand, (cultural) nationalist critics are quick to point out that the popularity of these books result from the authors’ deliberate catering to mainstream racist sentiments. Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* has enjoyed general popularity and feminist critical attention since its publication. The popularity of its film version has only intensified the already severe criticisms of racial selling out, made by African American literary and cultural critics. Black feminist Michelle Wallace feels the heat just like Alice Walker. In her words, some people see “parallels in the promotion of my book *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* as a *Ms* magazine cover in 1979, and the translation of Alice Walker’s novel *The Color Purple* into a successful movie.”⁴⁸ Wallace discusses how black feminist June Jordan in her review of Wallace’s book in *The Sunday New York Times* “characterized its production as part of a massive media conspiracy to deny the historical significance of the Civil Rights Movement.”⁴⁹ The tension between feminism and cultural and

nationalism is evident when Wallace emphasizes “a black feminist creativity that appeared to authorize a ‘negative’ view of the black community but was, in fact, engaged in reformulating black female subjectivity as the product of a complex structure of American (US) inequality.”⁵⁰

Thus we have an interesting phenomenon: women authors of color are highly visible only when they “become” controversial traitors of their racial or national culture. What is often hidden from the eyes of the public is that the racial or national culture that they have “betrayed” is defined and constructed according to masculine standards necessary to the maintenance of gender hierarchy. Controversial women authors of color haven’t betrayed their nation, but they are imagining a different kind of nation that explores women’s freedom and desires, betraying masculinist nationalist discourses.

The smooth operation of the controversies of women authors of color is inseparable from nationalistic appropriation and distortion of the term “feminism.” Despite decades of feminist research and development that link gender to other social factors such as race and class, the attempt to complicate gender as a critical category on occasions turns out to work against feminist critics. The recognition of difference among women is manipulated into a reductive discourse of difference that erases any connection between women of different racial and national backgrounds. Feminism is still understood or misunderstood as being solely concerned with gender issues and as “White,” an idea reinforced by post-colonial nationalism.

The view that feminist movement is solely about gender issues or women’s problems justifies sexist dismissal of these issues in relation to nation building. Instead of

being considered part of the project to build the nation, feminism is regarded as a distraction at best. In the global context, feminism is often labeled as “White,” revealing intricate interplay between gender, race and ethnicity. There are two levels of power play in this labeling. First, it is part of radical shifts within feminism that complicate gender with race, class and other social factors in an effort to develop feminism beyond racist discourses, conscious and unconscious, obvious and subtle, particularly concerning those Western feminist theories based on the needs and desires of college-educated, White, middle-class Euroamerican women. In the name of universal sisterhood that ignores hierarchies of race, ethnicity and nationality, gender critique on Third World women in “White” feminism contributes to colonialist discourses in which Eurocentric racial hierarchy is justified.

Critiques on the sole focus of gender by Western feminist scholarship are central to the development of Third World feminism that views gender in relation with other social factors such as race. Chandra Mohanty in her “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” argues for the necessity of feminist scholars and activists to reframe feminism in the international contexts instead of objectifying third world women. While acknowledging differences within Western feminism, she explains how Western feminisms have “colonized” third world women in their research by contributing to the production of third world discourses that “impl[y] a relation of structural domination, and a suppression—often violent—of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question.”⁵¹ Mohanty says that Western feminists usually establishes a privileged distance from the “backward” third world women, and at the same time they assume “ethnocentric universality,” unaware of their own prejudices as a result of their

specific location in the western scholarship. Thus, third world women become invisible and are merely a tool for white feminists to apply their “universal” theories to. Implicit in this scholarship is the theme of women as victim of male violence and of needs and problems in family and religion, both of which are also generalized from western perspectives. Without adequate research into the specific social, cultural and political contexts in which third world women are situated, western feminist scholarship silences the voices of third world women.

This critique is applicable to the debate on women authors of color. While women authors of color are attacked for “blindly” using Western feminism and creating a sexist national reality that caters to the stereotypical taste of Western audience, many feminist criticisms on those women writers of color simply confirm that attack when the critics conveniently conclude, with textual evidence, primitiveness of women of color and the inferiority of Third World culture as opposed to the West.

Kadiatu Kanneh also discusses this problem. In “Feminism and the Colonial Body,” she presents how race and gender interplay on the body of Third World woman. Drawing upon Frantz Fanon’s notion of racialized black body, Kanneh criticizes Western feminism for making female circumcision “one visible marker of outrageous primitivism, sexism, and *the* Third World woman.”⁵² She argues that “the subject of feminism in Africa is often seen to be the circumcised—hence, damaged and oppressed—Black Third World woman,” and it is in this condescending feminist thinking that “the bodies of Black people have been metaphorically invaded, analysed and represented by liberal, paternalist (or maternalist) principles.” As a result, she states that “a Black feminist response is often to defensively revalorize the role of men and traditional African

societies as indiscriminate wholes, against what is seen—often rightly—as arrogant and culturally ‘superior’ Western interference and insult.”⁵³ Thus, “the battle over the Black Third World woman’s body is staged as a battle between First World feminists and Black Third World men.”

Kanneh’s emphasis on the female colonial body as racially identified is illuminating to the intersecting power relations of gender and race. However, it is problematic that she does not even question the cultural and political supremacy of the masculine, promoted by post-colonialist theories, which erases gender from the female body. The fact that “a Black feminist”—does she mean all Black feminists?—has “often” to rescue Third World masculinity into heroism while ignoring the Third World woman’s body undergoing circumcision and mutilation betrays a grim picture of women’s social positions as well as the limited space for Third World feminism. It is especially disturbing if we consider the general indifference of men to “protect” the female body from harm in the case of genital circumcision and mutilation. Or should it be put in this way: it is exactly the so-called male “protection” that harms the female body in Third World nationalist context. While it is certainly necessary and legitimate to critique racism within feminist theories, prioritizing race over gender is a sign of self-censorship.

Granted, (white, middle-class) feminists have had their share of racism and other prejudices, and feminism has been appropriated as a tool to support the unequal power relations between Third World nations and the West. However, feminism is not a fixed priori: it has been changing its shapes and visions and will continue to evolve itself. Particularly since the 1980s, the terrain of feminism has changed so much that it is more and more acceptable to use its plural form feminisms to reflect its internal diversity and

conflicts. Nonetheless, many critics still automatically assume that feminists means white middle-class women who complain out of boredom of their racial and class privileges and thus feminism is always white, racist, imperialist, classist, and neocolonialist.

To label feminism as “White” also shows that feminism continues to be appropriated by nationalistic discourses against women’s own interests. It is partly a result of the competition for the female body between White masculinity and Third World masculinity, a struggle to be at the top of the racial and national hierarchy instead of at the bottom of it. How feminism is defined is just as important as the battle for the female body in the masculine competition. For the West, to understand feminism as “White” is to say that Western women are treated nicely by Western men who are civilized, enlightened and superior, whereas Third World women always suffer from the barbaric Third World men. The notion of feminism as “White” in the Third World context carries similar racial message about masculinity. That is, Third World men are legitimate and desirable whereas feminism is just another trick of racist Westerners to castrate their competitors.

The convenient equation of feminism with whiteness, or the construction of “a White feminism” across the world is in fact a simultaneous and deliberate backlash against feminism and feminist movements in the West as well as in the Third World. Embedded in this equation is a racialized nationalist discourse of female sexuality. Women of color, equipped with “White feminism,” would supposedly act like White women who surrender their body to the hegemonic White masculinity, ironically in the male gaze of both the West and the Third World.

This deliberate distortion or involuntary misunderstanding of feminism is key to

the production of controversial feminist authors of color. The political, cultural and social misunderstanding of feminism as always and only “White” points to the fundamental problem of subsuming gender to ethnic nationalistic discourses and separating gender from all other important social and political factors like race, class, religion and nationality. The feminist mission then is to take active part in the cultural production of feminism against appropriation and to read controversial women authors of color in a new theoretical framework that directs critical attention and debates beyond the artificial opposition of feminism and racial or ethnic nation.

Mappings of China and Chineseness

My project on the politics of literary and cultural criticism is done through exploring four controversial women authors in different Chinese locations. My attempt to continue with the specific controversies of these women authors will be at once stopped by a question that haunts and vexes scholars in Chinese literary and cultural studies. The question is, what exactly is China or Chineseness or Chinese literature? In the words of Michelle Yeh,

By China, do we mean Mainland China or both Mainland China and Taiwan? How do we place Hong Kong culturally, which has only recently become part of China again? What about the Chinese diaspora, or “Chinese overseas”? When we speak of twentieth-century Chinese literature, are we referring to works from Mainland China or do we also include those from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Chinese communities around the world where literature in Chinese is written and read?⁵⁴

The changing concept of “China” and the continuous redefinition of Chineseness demonstrate both the fluidity and tension of the “imagined community,” complicated by its unique history of semi-colonial legacies, territorial fragmentation, and political

instability. The transformation of China as a geopolitical location happens both historically and academically.

While nation is a bordered space, the birth of the Chinese nation, or rather the Chinese consciousness, is coupled with instability of that border as a result of Western violence in the form of economic, political and military invasion of China since the 17th century, particularly after the Opium Wars in the 1840s. Different from many other Third World nations subjected to colonial rules, China experienced territorial loss—Hong Kong to Britain, Macao to Portugal and Taiwan to Japan—and foreign occupation such as Japan's invasion of Manchuria (Northeastern China) and various Western Concessions in many Chinese cities. This crisis of national boundaries also came from within. Suffered through warlord era, three civil wars (the National Revolution of 1920s, the 1930s and the 1940s) and Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945, part of World War Two), China was divided into the Mainland, where the Communist governed People's Republic of China, and Taiwan, where the defeated KMT Nationalist Party continued Republic of China. In the many years of political struggle for the seat of the legitimate representative for China are the numerous attempts of both governments across the Taiwan Strait to draw political boundaries.

China's open-door policy to the world in the late 1970s and within itself across the Taiwan Strait in the 1980s started a new round of national and nationalist imaginations, intensified by the fate of Hong Kong, which was the reason of the summit between China and Britain. China's participation in economic and cultural globalization, although breaking down tightly patrolled national borders with economic and cultural exchange, made Chinese people aware of their bottom position in the hierarchical

international relations, thus reviving a new strong wave of nationalism and national consciousness. If the “return” of Hong Kong was a great success in China’s new mapping of its territory, the “problem” of Taiwan only proved futility of any “return” to the origin, which was very much a myth in itself. The rapid development of democratic movements in Taiwan has given rise to a Taiwanese consciousness, which means for some people independence—a complete break—from China while for others ambivalence about a return to the “motherland.” The mapping of China is rather unpredictable and even potentially bloody, which is dangerous side of the nation as an “imagined community.” It is dangerous because this mapping may become deadly seduction in nationalist discourses. Anderson eloquently explains how violence is romanticized. As he puts it, “the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, *not so much to kill, as willingly to die* for such limited imaginings.”⁵⁵ The truth is that people are willing to both die and kill for their national boundaries.

Mapping of China in literary and cultural studies is no less difficult and contradictory as the haunting demons are both from outside and from within. Some critics, especially mainland-based, are more concerned with Eurocentrism while others are anxious about Sinocentrism. Still many other scholars are critical of both trends, which simply substitute one hierarchy for another. Whatever the approach, defining “Chineseness” is a transnational discursive business.

Transnationality of Chineseness is obvious in the 1993 “Conference on Forty-Years of Chinese Literature: 1949-1993,” which embraces writers and scholars from the

Mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong and overseas Chinese communities. It is a both ambitious and ambivalent imagination about China, particularly concerning its territorial fragmentation, which explains why the conference covers Chinese literature after 1949, the year in which China was politically separated with two governments across the Taiwan Strait. On the one hand, it attempts to create a global cultural Chineseness against fragmentary political realities, with a kind of confidence that few future critics could enjoy or afford. That confidence enables it to encompass writers (who write) in Chinese of the Mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong and overseas, even Chinese American writers who write in English although this part is included in “Appendix” in the published book of conference papers. Shao Yuming, the initial conference organizer and one of the editors of the book with the same title, explains clearly his mapping of the global Chinese communities, each of which has composed in its own way “a national epic in blood and tears” since 1949.⁵⁶ What is interesting is his view on the overseas Chinese all over the world “from San Francisco to the Seine, from South Australia to North Europe:” “Almost wherever there are people, there will be footprints of us Chinese immigrants.”⁵⁷ This conference expresses his longing for a unified nation:

Faced with the realities of national fragmentation and looking forward to unification in the future, we believe that all of us descendants of Yan-Huang should reflect on the tremendous change of the nation for the past forty years. If we couldn’t embrace emotionally and examine rationally this national experience, how can we restore national feelings and establish common values so as to walk toward unification?⁵⁸

This longing seems to be overconfident in the stability of Chineseness with its wide range of inclusion across the globe. It leaves enough space for all later heated discussion and debates on problems such as Sinocentrism, Chineseness against the West, the particularities of Taiwan and Hong Kong, as well as the complexities of national or

racial consciousness of overseas Chinese. On the other hand, the conference participants are definitely aware of conflicts and instabilities of this newly imagined Chinese community, besides the rather obvious different literary developments in the three major areas—the Mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Wang Meng, a veteran writer from the Mainland, expresses his hope that literature will provide people with some “fresh wind,” “clean land,” and “joy,” free from bloody ideological and political battles based on such recycling dichotomies as “center/margin, mainstream/non-mainstream, and mainland/island.”⁵⁹ Although it seems that Wang underestimates the political power of literature and wishes to strip literature of its political meanings, he really advocates a freedom of thoughts and independence of writers from pressures of various sources. Quoting another conference participant Wu Liang, Wang recognizes that this conference is a journey “from confusion to even more profound confusion.”⁶⁰ Knowing that critics today are still struggling with the same dichotomies, I have to applaud for his foresight, however limited it might be.

What is worthy of noting is that the critics themselves are quite aware of the illegitimacy of their “discourse of legitimation” that imposes Chineseness upon a vast range of literary writing when dealing with literature by overseas Chinese, especially concerning literary writing in English by Chinese American writers. Dexing Shan’s mapping is obvious in the title of his essay “Imagining Homeland: On the Image of China in Chinese American Literature,” which discusses such prominent Chinese American writers as Jade Snow Wong, Louise Chu, Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan, and Frank Chin. That is, these writers belong to the tradition of Chinese American literature and American literature, and their only connection to China is their imagined “China” or

“Chineseness,” which is Chinatown in America, not China. Although characters of older generation, particularly first-generation immigrants, remain some kind of emotional tie to China, the new American-born generation are decidedly being and becoming American, even if it means that they also have to deal with racism that demand that they “go back” to China. “China” or “Chineseness” for them is actually Chinese Americanness in the making, and it has less to do with China than with America, their real homeland.

The scholars are cautious of a Chinese center even in their discussion of overseas literature in Chinese, which are usually accepted without doubt as Chinese literature, or rather literature in Chinese. Already recognized writers when they left China, they have or should have a closer tie and claim to this “motherland” or “homeland” far away. However, at the same time the critics include their writing into the China-centered space, the center is deconstructed or ceases to exist. The desire to “return” to homeland is thawed by the desire to leave, complicated with indeterminacy of a fragmented home or multiple homes. Where should they return to, the Mainland, Taiwan, or Hong Kong? Or even Singapore?⁶¹ While Zhang Xiguo’s prodigal writers are inspired by their ambivalent homesickness, Ping Lu simply points out that homesickness is just an illusion and myth. In other words, “not only has sentimental homesickness, which once flooded fiction by Chinese students studying abroad, disappeared by and by, but the concepts of the so-called return, so-called identification, and so-called serving one’s motherland have lost their sacred semiotic significance in the new writing.”⁶² “China” is no longer a center but a backdrop in their stories, and in fact, it is exactly the disappearance of the nation that has inspired them to write.⁶³ On the other hand, Leo Ou-fan Lee’s analysis of overseas Chinese literature resembles Dexing Shan’s discussion of Chinese American

literature. Lee argues that overseas Chinese writers have to deal with their Chinese legacy as well as Western culture. What they search for is not a homeland that is forever lost, but a new flexible hybrid “border crossing” identity that is “neither Chinese nor Western, or both Chinese and Western.”⁶⁴ Overseas Chinese writers may be more concerned with what is going on in China, but this homeland is neither stable nor singular. As Lee puts it, “Perhaps, the homeland is not necessarily a unified objective reality, but multiple subjective images, while every overseas Chinese may have several homelands in their hearts.”⁶⁵ To take Lee’s argument a step further, I want to point out that the multiple meanings of Chineseness are defined not just against Chineseness as essentialized Sinocentric pull, but also against Chineseness as essentialized Eurocentric rejection. In other words, Chineseness is a political and cultural negotiation between essentialized interpellations from both the (racist) West and (nationalist) China.

The two essentializing mappings of Chineseness are what Rey Chow considered Chineseness as “a theoretical problem,”⁶⁶ mired in some discourses of authenticity created by Western critics and Chinese scholars while recycling the same hierarchical relation of the West versus China. Chineseness must be imagined beyond the homogeneity of both Eurocentrism and Sinocentrism. The purpose of Chow is to introduce “differences” within China studies. One of her examples focuses on linguistic choice of Mandarin, spoken in Beijing (the center of China), over other Chinese “dialects” that are spoken elsewhere in China and in the world, as the “*spoken*” standard Chinese in China and in China studies. Although the written Chinese—traditional and simplified—is shared and accepted by all different communities, it is spoken in such a

difference that people of different dialects can hardly understand each other. Thus, Mandarin as a standard of spoken Chinese rather imposes itself on the majority of Chinese speakers, who do not speak in Mandarin dialect. On the other hand, for a Western scholar, speaking Mandarin is a plus; however, for a Chinese, it is a must. Chow criticizes the common practice in faculty hiring that prefers a Western China scholar with limited Mandarin experience to a native Chinese scholar excelling at written Chinese and Chinese literature yet having a distant linguistic experience with Mandarin. She thinks that the majority of China does not speak the Beijing-based Mandarin and that the reason Mandarin is so important to China scholars lies in the fact that “Mandarin is, properly speaking, also *the white man’s Chinese*, the Chinese that receives its international authentication as ‘standard Chinese’ in part because, among the many forms of Chinese speeches, it is the one inflected with the largest number of foreign, especially Western, accents.”⁶⁷ The choice of Mandarin Chinese, instead of, say, Cantonese Chinese, to be the standard language for Chinese literary and cultural studies is therefore a consequence of both Sinocentrism and Eurocentrism. I personally do not think it matters which “dialect” is the chosen one, for it will have to go through the same interrogations that Rey Chow conducts here. Chow has, however, stretched our imagination of linguistic boundaries on Chineseness. The idea to consider other dialects as legitimate languages is provocative. It is hard to imagine how studies on Hong Kong and Hong Kong literature might be enhanced or transformed if Cantonese is introduced into the fields.

The title of Ien Ang’s essay “Can One Say No to Chineseness?” suggests a similar rejection of Sinocentric and Eurocentric interpellation, although he focuses mainly on

Sinocentric homogenization of a diverse community. Against the notion of “cultural China,” he turns to the paradigm of the Chinese diaspora, in which, there are “many different Chinese identities, not one.”⁶⁸ For him, the project is not just “decentering the center” of Communist China, the goal of Tu Wei-ming’s “cultural China” that crosses boundaries at many levels, ethnicity, territory, ideology, linguistic, and so on. Tu’s emphasis on “a common ancestry and a shared cultural background” is demonstrated in his metaphor of the living tree, which happens to be the title of his book. The claim of different branches to the same roots is what strikes Ang as a newly established center, “this time along the cultural lines.”⁶⁹ However strong the branches grow, their identities depend on the roots. In this sense, Tu’s decentering is not complete, and to be thorough is to cut the ties to China. Chineseness, thus, does not have to be defined in relation to China but only in its specific local conditions. It is difficult, not surprisingly, because “[h]ow Chinese is made to mean in different contexts, and who gets to decide what it means or should mean, is the object of intense contestation, a struggle over meaning with wide-ranging cultural and political implications.”⁷⁰ Ang’s decentering is interestingly similar to Leo Lee’s conclusion of “multiple homelands.” Employing James Clifford’s idea of multiple origins (for the origin ‘is not necessarily a single place or an exclusivist nation’), Ang states that the obsession with China should stop. As he says, “If I am inescapably Chinese by *descent*, I am only sometimes Chinese by *consent*. When and how is a matter of politics.”⁷¹

Ang’s disengagement from the center of China, however, seems to show *his* obsession with Chineseness, and the pressure does not just come from Sinocentric critics but Eurocentric Otherization. Even if one severs his/her ties—linguistic, cultural, what

have you—to China, s/he is still interpellated as “Chinese” in the West as well as in other countries. The story of William Yang, with which Ang begins his essay and to which he returns in the end, is indeed “the dominant culture’s classificatory practice, operating as a territorializing power highly effective in marginalizing the other.”⁷² William Yang who was born and grew up in Australia is not considered Australian, but Australian-Chinese. His first awareness of his Chineseness is quite negative, being called names—‘Ching Chong Chinaman’—by a kid at school when he was six.

I had no idea what he meant although I knew from his expression that he was being horrible.

I went home to my mother and I said to her, “Mum, I’m not Chinese, am I?” My mother looked at me very sternly and said, “Yes you are.”

Her tone was hard and I knew in that moment that being Chinese was some terrible curse and I could not rely on my mother for help. Or my brother, who was four years older than me, and much more experienced in the world. He said, “And you’d better get used to it.”⁷³

Yang explains how his parents chose to let go of the Chinese root, raising their kids in the ‘Western’ manner without any interest in passing down the Chinese tradition. Yet this story is less an attack on the “living tree” metaphor of Tu’s “cultural China,” but a Eurocentric mapping of both Chineseness and Australianess. Basically, Australianess means Whiteness, and Chineseness signifies foreignness and non-Australianess, even anti-Australianess. Rejecting Chineseness here means rejecting and transgressing the ethnic boundaries set up by Eurocentric nationalist imagination.

Ang’s account of the Peranakan Chinese in Indonesia, of which he is a member until his teenage years, also shows interpellation other than from the China center. As Ang notes it, the Peranakan Chinese is famous for their willingness to go ‘native,’ marrying “local women,” speaking “the local languages,” and living in “local lifestyle.” On the other hand, he does mention that they are “selectively holding on to some Chinese

traditions.” Ang and other critics are perplexed by their identification with Chineseness or at least recognition of their Chinese ancestry, because this identification with Chineseness is not China-centered, and as Ang says, ““China” has no relevance at all in their lives.” Exactly because of the irrelevancy of “China,” I suggest we should turn to their Indonesian contexts. Their sense of Chineseness has nothing to do with emotional connections with Chinese in the global communities but lies in their uneasy difference from the local, however many centuries they have resided there. Their choices of Chinese traditions to be passed onto the next generations may be voluntary, but may also be forced choices, if we consider the fact that Indonesia “deploys a strict assimilation policy to eradicate Chinese difference within the national culture (For example, by banning the use of Chinese characters from public display).”⁷⁴ I do not think that this policy rids their Chineseness but accentuates it. As a constant reminder, the extreme discouraging measures in Indonesia ironically encourage and impose Chinese identification. This attempt to erase Chinese difference is really no different from William Yang’s Australian experience, in which Yang’s difference is emphasized. They are the two sides of the same coin, both considering Chineseness as a threat that needs to be contained, either by categorization or erasure. Here the imagined Chineseness is not to serve the Chinese communities, but to maintain the national boundaries of Indonesia or Australia.

With this in mind, I read different meanings into Ang’s conclusion:

There is no necessary advantage in a Chinese identification here; indeed, depending on context and necessity, it may be political mandatory to refuse the primordial interpellation of belonging to the largest race of the world, the “family” of “the Chinese people.” In such situations, the significant question is not only, Can one say no to China? but also, can one, when called for, say no to Chineseness?⁷⁵

I cannot help thinking that Ang’s rejection of Chineseness may have much to do with

negative experiences within Eurocentric and other non-Chinese contexts. If it is so, then his refusal would mean conformation, not opposition, to racist or authoritarian politics. However, his saying-no-to-Chineseness position is very daring and inspiring. If Ang means to “say no” to essentialized Chineseness in “cultural China,” I think it would be even more radical to “say no” to essentialist nationalism on all sides, either Eurocentric or Sinocentric or other.

Michelle Yeh brings forward the concept of “transnational critic” who travels across borders and does comparative studies of different forms of Chineseness so as to avoid nationalistic limitations in the imagination of the Chinese communities, although she also focuses much on China-centeredness. In my opinion, Chineseness can be defined in relation to different centers, as explained previously. Yeh’s comparative perspective on “[l]ocal appropriation of Western theory in different Chinese contexts,” namely the Mainland and Taiwan, is inspiring in that the different experiences of Western theory in the Mainland and Taiwan show the different social and cultural conditions in these two geopolitical locations.⁷⁶ While Yeh points out that the popularity of postcolonialism in the Mainland results from its “implicit affinity with official nationalism,” she sees obvious that postcolonialism being influential in Taiwan has a lot to do with the rise of a new kind of nationalism, an anti-Chinese Taiwanese consciousness, which is both liberating (in transgressing the official Chinese borders) and exclusive or even oppressive (in mapping a rigid nationalist boundary of Taiwan). As Yeh states, “every nationalism contains ‘oppressive potentialities,’ and the other side of ‘nationalisms of liberation’ are ‘nationalisms of domination.’”⁷⁷

My project starts from the limitation of nationalism. The different nationalistic definitions of Chineseness, Eurocentric or Sinocentric or other, result from competition in the hierarchy of power. To be exact, it is a competition of nationalistic masculinity, depending very much on ethnic gender and sexual boundaries. This is evident from the controversies of four contemporary women authors in different Chinese locations, the subject of my study here.

The four women authors are from four Chinese communities—Maxine Hong Kingston from Chinese America, Wei Hui from Mainland China, Li Ang from Taiwan and Li Bihua from Hong Kong. Each is a unique case, but all share the nationalistic and feminist claims to women's bodies, often complicated by voyeurism of a globalized popular culture. To include Chinese America in this project is not to reaffirm a racist designation of Chinese Americans (as well as Asian Americans in general) as “foreigners within,”⁷⁸ nor am I trying to reinforce a China-centered imagined community for it to return to. My own mapping of the different Chinese locations are inspired by Chandra Mohanty's concept of Third World, an imagined community of flexibility and constant change including both the traditional Third World countries and the communities of people of color in the West, which are connected not generically but politically for their shared social and political experiences in Eurocentric domination.⁷⁹ I am less concerned with the debates on Chineseness than with the much neglected discursive struggle between feminism and nationalism in their sometimes fixed production of a fluid imagined community. My choice of four contemporary controversial women authors in different Chinese communities speaks not just to the global Chinese communities, but addresses to the Third World, especially Third World women trapped in the theoretically

produced woman/nation dilemma. I hope I am thinking like a “transnational critic” who offers comparative perspectives not just within the field of Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies, but on Third World women as well.

Toward a New Feminist Literary and Cultural Criticism

Feminist literary and cultural criticism is a form of activism, for reading not only interprets racial, ethnic and national culture, but it actively *produces* culture and reality. The controversies of women authors of color are directly related to our personal and social assumptions not only on gender and sexuality. More importantly, they are closely connected to our imagining of feminism. It is critical that feminists produce a new framework that reads feminism out of homogenized distortion and appropriation, thus reading women authors of color out of controversies.

In the first place, “reading” controversial women authors of color from feminist perspectives is absolutely necessary. After a century’s slow struggle and a rapid development in the past few decades, feminism is faced with a great predicament. While people in the West consider our time as a post-feminist era, thinking that women are already liberated and equal to men and that feminism is no longer relevant, women in the Third World are encouraged to serve their national interests by disavowing their feminist desires, which are said to be nothing but Western imperialist/neocolonialist control and corruption. On the one hand, it is exactly because of the lack of feminist production that this kind of deliberate misunderstanding and misproduction of feminist politics succeed. On the other hand, it demonstrates a deep-rooted gender hierarchy, central to essentialist

masculinist ethnocentric nationalism—Eurocentrism included, which is exactly what feminism is against.

Secondly, feminism must be envisioned outside nationalism, resisting and refusing masculinist nationalistic interpellation. Virginia Woolf in her much controversial *Three Guineas* advocates “freedom from unreal loyalties,” which means that “you must rid yourself of pride of nationality in the first place” in addition to pride in other things such as religion, school, family, sex and so on.⁸⁰ She argues for “an attitude of complete indifference” to nationalist patriotism through an “Outsiders’ Society” of women:

She will bind herself to take no share in patriotic demonstrations; to assent to no form of national self-praise; to make no part of any claue or audience that encourages war; to absent herself from military displays, tournaments, tattoos, prize-givings and all such ceremonies as encourage the desire to impose “our” civilization or “our” dominion upon other people.⁸¹

Although she essentializes differences between men/masculinity and women/femininity, her analysis that directly relates nationalist patriotism with male dominance is radical and poignant. The significance of Woolf’s feminist resistance of nationalism is that it takes place both domestically and internationally. Although not elaborated, she is critical of unequal power relations between nations. In this sense, her famous declaration—“[A]s a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world”—is not as simple as later critics have made it. Breaking away from nationalistic confinement, she is a pioneer of international feminism. Her refusal to impose upon other people and her embrace of connection among women make a lot of sense at present.

Much scholarship has been done on complicating gender with other interacting social issues like race and class for the past few decades. I am particularly inspired by

Susan Stanford Friedman's concept of locational feminism, a theory of "beyondness"—beyond gender, beyond difference and above all, beyond binary mode of thinking, "beyond the conventional boundaries between us and them, white and other, First World and Third World, men and women, oppressor and oppressed, fixity and fluidity."⁸² It believes that identity is multiple, flexible and changeable, and it is

a historically embedded site, a positionality, a location, a standpoint, a terrain, an intersection, a network, a crossroads of multiply situated knowledges. It articulates not the organic unfolding of identity but rather the mapping of territories and boundaries, the dialectical terrains of inside/outside or center/margin, the axial intersections of different positionalities, and the spaces of dynamic encounter—the "contact zone," the "middle ground," the borderlands, *la frontera*.⁸³

In an optimistic and almost utopian vision of feminism, Friedman celebrates flexibility of gender and difference. She states that locational feminism thinks "beyond gender," not to abandon gender as an analytical category but to consider gender as one of the vital intertwining aspects of people's identities. Locational feminism also envisions "beyond difference," not to ignore differences and unequal power relations among women and feminists, but to see power relations as multidirectional negotiation and dialogic, instead of unidirectional domination. The "pluralization" from feminism to feminisms should not divide feminists of different geopolitical locations permanently but "has spawned the need for a new singularization of feminism that assumes difference without reifying or fetishizing it. The borders between sites of feminism surely exist, but just as surely they are and must be transgressed."⁸⁴ Locational feminism is "a turning outward, an embrace of contradiction, dislocation and change," underscoring

the lack of solid ground, the ceaseless change of fluidity, the nomadic wandering of transnational diaspora, the interactive syncretisms of "global

ethnoscape,” or the interminable circuitry of cyberspace. Its mobile figurations adapt the landscapes of accelerating change, the technologies of information highways, and the globalization of migratory culture.⁸⁵

Neither limited nor fixed, locational feminism is “multicultural, international, and transnational,” pointing out interconnection between the global and the local. That is, “the local is always informed by the global and the global by the local.”⁸⁶

The most significant achievement of Friedman is her breakdown of any reductive binary essentialism that sets up rigid boundaries of difference among feminists while acknowledging that difference. For “the identification of difference among women needs to be complemented by a search for common ground, however differently that commonality is materially manifested.”⁸⁷ In her discussion of the dead end of feminist theory and practice due to the white/other binary, she points out the limitations of cultural narratives of denial, accusation and confession or guilt that prevent feminists of different racial backgrounds from listening to and hearing each other. Typically in these cultural narratives, white feminists calls for a universal sisterhood denying racism, feminists of color “accuse” white feminists of racism, and white feminists “confess” and admit guilt. Friedman cautions that feminists should not essentialize whiteness since neither “white” nor “other” in the binary is monolithic or unchanging. She argues that racism as “always already” white is a construct, pointing out racism among people of color and ethnic conflicts among white people, such as those between “the English and Irish; the Germans and the French; the Bosnians, Serbs and Croats; the Europeans and the Jews or the Gypsies.” However, “the construction of racism as always already white reflects the hegemony of white racism,” not just “in the United States” as she notes it, but in the world.⁸⁸ Friedman suggests a cultural narrative of relational positionality as a supplement

to other narratives to de-essentialize the racial divide between white women and women of color. Instead of always seeing white women and women of color oppositional because of their racial identities, she argues that a person can be both the oppressor and the oppressed, depending on the specific situations she is in.

Friedman's goal is to establish some common ground for all feminists beyond the racial divide, and her project of de-essentialization sheds a new light to the controversies of women authors of color, although I disagree with her to a point. She argues that terms like "women of color" or "Third World women" are not sufficient to reflect contradictions and complexities of women's multiple identities since such terms lock women of different races into the fixed binary of white/other. While I agree that feminists need to look at categories such as "women of color" and "Third World women" critically, I do not think that these terms are necessarily "in opposition to" White women, nor are they automatically accusatory of White people. Just as Friedman says, whiteness is not equivalent of racism, although I have different reasoning from Friedman. While her focus is on "the construction of *racism* as always already *white*,"⁸⁹ I am concerned that the White or the West is always already racist, white-supremacist or Eurocentric. In my opinion, the terms "Third World women" or "women of color" are defined in order to critique male-centered and Eurocentric hierarchies, not to silence individual or a whole group of White men and women, who may or may not be male-centered or Eurocentric. This applies to critiques on all kind of center/margin hierarchies. Whatever and however such terms as "women of color" mean, fixed or fluid, depends on whatever and however feminists make them mean. Therefore, the solution is not to abandon these terms but to keep them flexible.

My idea of “Third World women authors” is in no way oppositional to White women or White feminists, although it implies different experiences between White women authors and Third World women authors. It is inspired by Chandra Mohanty’s mapping of Third World women, but it is defined more in relation to the shared experience of sexism and Eurocentric racism than in opposition to Western feminist politics. It is exactly the essentialization of racial and sexual hierarchies that situates women authors of color in the feminist-nationalist controversy. This is also exactly the significance of Friedman’s project, particularly relevant to my research. On the other hand, pointing out difference between Third World women and White Women in experiencing feminist and nationalist discourses does not mean that White feminists enjoy a harmonious relationship with nationalism. Rather, the tension between feminism and nationalism in this case is mostly dormant and hidden until the occurrence of some national crisis, while it is constant for Third World women as a result of the popularity of nationalism due to the history of Eurocentric colonialism and neocolonialism. The controversy of Virginia Woolf’s *Three Guineas* is certainly an example of feminist-nationalist conflicts in face of the threat of an imminent war, which gave rise to passionate patriotism that trivialized and silenced voices of dissidents. What was/is at stake was/is not just Virginia Woolf’s *Three Guineas*, but the legitimacy of feminist cause in general.

Nigel Nicolson’s comments on Woolf’s feminist argument in 1979 and 2000 is particularly telling:

Today the newspapers print every day the obituaries of women who began distinguished careers at the very time when Virginia was protesting that few opportunities existed for them. She drew most of her examples from the past, but presented them in such a way as to suggest that they were still relevant.

She was describing a world that had evaporated, but which to her was still real. She, who had won free from it so young, so defiantly, so successfully, was almost alone in imagining that nothing had basically changed.⁹⁰

What is shocking about Nicolson's comments is not just that he trivializes or even pathologizes Woolf's feminist arguments against nationalism and Fascism, by labeling them as "imaginary" and evoking the too familiar stereotype of Woolf as a mad woman locked in too much imagination. It is shocking also for the reason that it trivializes and pathologizes feminism in general with the too familiar stereotype of feminists as angry, mad and irrelevant. "Virginia" in this passage could mean any feminist today, and in fact, Nicolson is not at all "alone" in his manipulative definition of feminism.

It is in this sense that feminist critics should "imagine" a new literary and cultural criticism that produces not only textual meanings of individual authors but also cultural significance of feminism. Focusing on the author, the text as well as the critic, it not only reads "primary" texts by the authors, but it considers extremely necessary to read "secondary" criticisms, in which meanings of "primary texts" are constructed. In a sense, literary criticism is never secondary. On the contrary, it is always the "primary" producer of primary texts. However, this is not the only reason that literary criticism is primary. It is primary for the more important reason that it produces politically-charged "cultural narratives" on such critical issues as gender, race and nation. In other words, it is in literary and cultural criticism that realities of gender, race and nation are narrated, constructed, reproduced and deconstructed. Criticism on a specific text and author is thus not limited to that text or author. On the one hand, it is part of the political process of literary and cultural canon formation, with literary merits determined less by an objective

standard than by subjective values on issues like gender, race and nation. On the other, it is part of the overall cultural narrations of such subjective values. It is a cycle of cultural production and reproduction, in which “narrated realities” on such critical issues as gender and nation determine “narrated realities” of literary canon, which decide the values of individual authors and texts. Moreover, the evaluation of individual texts produces “narrated realities” of these texts, which reinforce “narrated realities” of literary canon and of issues like gender and nation.

In the production of meanings of an individual text lies the present and future development of feminism. The new feminist criticism does not end with producing a new meaning of a specific text or author. It regards reading of an individual text as active intervention in the mechanism of literary canon formation on the one hand, and on the other as part of the critical project of defining and reviving feminism against masculinist-nationalist appropriations. It is both fluid and oppositional: fluid for the purpose to abandon traditional hierarchical dualistic thinking while oppositional precisely for the reason that dualistic thinking is so pervasive. Its newness does not mean a complete break from previous feminist reading practices, but a step further toward the common goal of, in the word of Friedman, “multicultural, international, and transnational feminism.”⁹¹ Just as Friedman acknowledges much relevancy of gender-focused gynocriticism to the development of her locational feminism, locational feminism and its flexible “new geography of identity” are still extremely necessary. While Friedman employs the term “relational positionality” to describe the web of different and interconnected power relations writers and characters are in, I want us to analyze the different positions of various critics in such relations of power and investigate how those different

positionalities of critics have produced different understanding or misunderstanding of feminism, in order to take active participation in the imagining of feminist framework that will not only develop productive approaches to individual texts but also promote further development of feminist literary and cultural criticism, particularly against masculinist nationalist discursive control.

Conclusion

Controversial women authors of color are culturally and theoretically produced, and the production of the controversies relies largely on a deeply rooted binary thinking. Once a professor told me that the English language is essentially binary and that to think in English beyond the concept of “either/or” would be challenging. The feminist understanding of women authors of color and various critics as active and aggressive cultural producers of gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity and the nation provides women authors of color and feminist critics with a theoretical framework beyond the pitfalls of either/or binarism. Instead of focusing on whether women authors of color have properly represented an assumed fixed reality of race, ethnic and the nation, I suggest that feminists accentuate the cultural significance of criticism and intervene in the cultural production of realities. Instead of demanding women authors of color “represent” the totality of her racial, ethnic, gender or national culture, feminist critics should enthusiastically create meanings, through our reading, of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity and the nation.

It is true that dominant cultures have tried their best to manipulate any disruptive texts and will continue to do so. It is also true that literary works have at least the

potential of certain social impacts and thus writers inevitably shoulder some social responsibilities. However, cultural productions do not stop here. Instead, the publications of writers' works are only the beginning of the making of a tradition. Literary and cultural critics of various backgrounds and theoretical schools have all been part of the "game." In fact, they pushed the tradition-making further with their often influential interpretations, which have steered the directions of general receptions of these works. In the process of literary production and digestion, cultures and traditions are invented, revised, discovered and made.

Chapter 1 Maxine Hong Kingston: In Search of a Heroine

Maxine Hong Kingston is no doubt one of the most important and controversial Chinese American author today. Her controversy is a classic example of the theoretical tension between feminism and cultural nationalism, caught in the Eurocentric discourse of “representational inevitability.” Gender and race as categories of critical analysis seem mutually exclusive, which have greatly impacted the ways we read and the ways we write. Not only is this assumed irreconcilability of race and gender responsible for the Kingston controversy, but it is also testified by the very controversial author—Kingston—who could not create just one book for both Chinese American men and women but had to write separately—*The Woman Warrior* for women and *China Men* for men.

Since its publication in 1976, Kingston’s autobiography *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of Girlhood Growing up among Ghosts* has won several awards including the 1976 National Book Critics Circle award for the best nonfiction, the 1976 Anisfield-Wolf Race Relations Award, and the award from *Mademoiselle* in 1977. It topped the best-seller lists of *New York Times Book Review* and others, was named by *Time* magazine in 1979 as one of the top ten nonfiction books of the decade, and had until Amy Tan’s 1989 *The Joy Luck Club* represented the Asian American literature in mainstream literary market.¹ It becomes ‘the most widely taught book by a living writer in U.S. colleges and universities,’² has been hailed by many as “a triumph of the Asian American literature,”³ and has generated vigorous and numerous research still ongoing at present, including books, conferences, a casebook, and a pedagogical book *Approaches of*

Teaching Maxine Hong Kingston. Besides traditional print publications, Kingston is also quite visible in cyberspace with some sort of “stardom” with her own “cult”—groups, online libraries, research papers, etc.

Kingston’s exploration of mother-daughter relationship and her exposure of silencing sexism in Chinese and Chinese American cultures render the book explicitly feminist while its innovative formal structure—“a blend of personal reminiscences, imaginative reconstructions of family events, and outright fantasies”⁴—attracts great attention from many postmodernist critics. However, Asian American feminists and cultural nationalists who emphasize the critical significance of fighting against Eurocentric racism while building Asian America show their serious concern with Kingston’s marketing strategy of the book, as well as their dissatisfaction with the inadequacy of classic feminism that foregrounds gender analysis at the expense of other necessary categories of analysis, particular race, which makes classic feminist critics voluntary or involuntary accomplices to the cultural production of race and racism against Asian Americans. In the midst of busy shuttling of these politically charged and often oversimplistic critiques, Kingston is trapped: she is either hailed as a feminist champion who breaks silence or attacked as a racial traitor who sells out to white-centered America, contributing to the maintenance of racial hierarchy against Asian Americans.

Focusing on the debate on Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, this chapter delineates the historical production of this theoretical dilemma between gender and race, a costly dilemma in which Kingston, as well as many women authors of color in the U.S.,

finds herself. Emphasizing “production” over “representation” to demonstrate flexibility and fluidity of culture, tradition and theory, this chapter argues that Kingston “produces” a part of Chinese American tradition that may confirm or contradict the already produced ones, instead of “representing” a preconceived, for whatever reasons, unchanging homogeneous totality called “authentic Chinese American reality.” It also asserts that, with their readings and interpretations, the critics (Kingston herself included), have “produced” meanings of the text, Kingston the author, Chinese American history and culture, feminism and cultural nationalism.

First, I re-presents the “original” arguments of the debate, asserting that the controversy is discursively produced, not so much by the inadequacies of classic gender-only feminism and traditional race-only cultural nationalism, as by theoretical inability to imagine beyond the framework of “representational inevitability.” Starting with quarrels between classic feminism and cultural nationalism, the controversy is centered on autobiography as a genre, which ultimately boils down to the question of ethnic authenticity and its mis/representation.

Second, I argue that the Kingston debate is in fact a debate on the female body. It is a battle for the power to define and interpret the Chinese American female body among critics of various geopolitical background, particularly between Eurocentric feminists, Asian American cultural nationalists, and Asian American feminists. Analyzing the many interpretations of the Kingston debate, I acknowledge inspiring insights of these critiques from which I no doubt benefit while I also point out that these criticisms seem to produce or reproduce a mutual exclusiveness of gender and race, of women and their community. On the one hand, I find necessary their effort to contextualize, since it recognizes

changes and development of both feminism and cultural nationalism. On the other hand, this contextualization of the debate does not mean anything unless it provides me with insight into the development of feminist project today. My revisit to the Kingston debate is not just to solve a historical problem and then leave it alone, but it is to shed light on the imagination of a feminist framework beyond artificial competition of gender and race so as to dissolve the theoretical dilemma for women authors of color in the past, at present and in the future.

Lastly, I assert that Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is a narration of gender and race in the American geopolitical context, a narration embodied by none other than the female body. This reading is my production of Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and of Chinese America, and it is a feminist reading in which issues of gender and race in Kingston's text do not contradict but complement each other.

“Cultural Misreadings?:” Eurocentric Feminism, Asian American Cultural Nationalism, and the Production of Meanings

The Kingston controversy concerning the cultural significance of *The Woman Warrior* has been from the beginning more about how critics read than how writers write. In her “Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers,” Kingston strongly criticizes critics and reviewers for “measuring the book and me against the stereotype of the exotic, inscrutable, mysterious oriental” and for equating her creative texts with Chinese American realities.⁵ She points out the hidden Eurocentric tendency in literary criticism when some critics attack her book for being “inauthentic” by comparing her book literally with their own personally experiences with Chinese Americans:

I have never before read a critic who took a look at a Jewish American spouse and said, “There’s something wrong with that Saul Bellow and Norman Mailer. They aren’t at all like the one I’m married to.” Critics do not ask whether Vonnegut is typical of German Americans; they do not ask whether J.P. Donleavy is typical of Irish Americans. You would never know by reading the reviews of Francine du Plessix Gray’s *Lovers and Tyrants* that it is by and about an immigrant from France. Books written by Americans of European ancestry are reviewed as American novels.⁶

This seemingly inevitable representational relationship between Kingston and Chinese America is thus a product of a universal Eurocentric reading practice, employed by both mainstream and ethnic critics and applied to authors of color whose artistic freedom is always sacrificed. Kingston’s question—“Why must I ‘represent’ anyone besides myself? Why should I be denied an individual artistic vision?”⁷—refuses the constrictive discourse of representation while demanding that critics must read in different ways so as to stop producing the controversy she and many other women authors of color are pulled in. Kingston’s question can thus be rephrased. Instead of “Why must I ‘represent’ anyone besides myself?” that directs attention to the author, the question should be directed to the critics, “Why must I read (women) authors of color into the confinement of representational inevitability?”

The Kingston controversy did not begin with the publication of *The Woman Warrior*, but it started with textual readings, limited mainly to gender-only classic feminism or race-only Asian American cultural nationalism. Although soon picked up and intensified in academia, the first battle took place with reviews on mainstream media. It was believed that John Leonard’s “In Defiance of 2 Worlds,” published on the September 17th, 1976 issue of *New York Times*, brought the public attention to Kingston and *The Woman Warrior*, pointing out the “original” “shuttling, on the electric line of

prose, between fantasy and specificity.”

It [The Woman Warrior] is fierce intelligence, all sinew, prowling among the emotions. As a portrait of village life in pre-Mao China, it is as about sentimental as Celine. As an account of growing up female and Chinese American in California, in a laundry of course, it is antinostalgic. It burns the fat right out of the mind. As a dream—of the “female avenger,” it is dizzying, elemental, a poem turned into a sword.”⁸

Leonard’s notion on Chinese Americans is certainly influenced by stereotypes of Chinese America with phrases like “in a laundry of course” and “always the unwanted female child.” These phrases, while reinforcing preconceived stereotype, seem to also have refuted it with an expectation for something different from “the unwanted female child” or from the setting of “a laundry.” This probably explains why he didn’t draw much fire from either feminist critics or cultural nationalist critics.

It was Diane Johnson who first pitted the issue of gender against the issue of race in her reading of *The Woman Warrior*. A powerful feminist review that still resonates among feminist critics today, Johnson’s “Ghosts” is nonetheless limited to the discourse of representational inevitability and has made a clear racist, although possibly unintentional as she indicated in her response to Jeffrey Paul Chan, generalization of Chinese America.

Diane Johnson, a faculty at the University of California at Davis, is a typical example of mainstream Western feminism working hand in hand with racism. Johnson categorizes Kingston as a female autobiography of “protest and madness” in opposition to the masculine tone of “wisdom and ‘adjustment’” presented by male autobiographies. Pointing out the genre hierarchy that prefers fiction to autobiography for the lack of “invention” in the latter, Johnson presents an important feminist argument on the “fictional” form of autobiography, which has later been dealt with by different critics and

scholars. Johnson states that Kingston's book "suggest[s] that the distinction between what is autobiographically true and fiction has become somewhat arbitrary."

Fiction and memoir have come to resemble each other more and more. Novelists make real historical figures speak to fictional characters. Memorialists dramatize the thought and speeches of their forefathers, as in a novel about them. The access of the autobiographer to dramatic techniques has allowed him to handle root meanings, the mysterious crises of spirit, even the intangibles of heritage more essentially, that is more truly, than he once could.⁹

In the first four-fifths of her review, Johnson situates Kingston within the tradition of Western female autobiography and the context of "universal" gender hierarchy while being aware, if only passingly, that Kingston's account of Chinese American experiences is subjective and incomplete. As Johnson puts it, Kingston "presents another side, perhaps the female side, of growing up in a tradition, perhaps any tradition. Women perform for any society the service of maladjustment that Kingston here brilliantly performs for the society of Chinese immigrants in California." When she discusses the misogyny in Chinese and Chinese American cultures, Johnson argues that what "cripples" Chinese American women also "are the bindings on every woman's feet." Therefore, she concludes that "[i]n the vivid particularity of her experience, and with the resources of a considerable art, Kingston reaches to the universal qualities of female condition and female anger that the bland generalities of social science and the merely factual history cannot describe."¹⁰

Unfortunately, Johnson ends her review with shocking racist stereotypical judgment and ill-informed observations on Chinese American community as a whole, a conclusion drawing upon her interpretation of Kingston's text and confirmed by her own personal experiences. Those statements about Chinese American tradition as "a notably unassimilated culture," with its bizarre traditions (in food, for example) and generations

of Chinese Americans “who speak no English,” are definitely a result (if unconsciously) of the century-long racist sentiments and policies in the United States.¹¹ What makes matter worse is that her argument perpetuates the myth of Chinese America, as well as Asian America as a whole, as foreigners no matter how many generations of the people have lived in the States. Her reading produces, in the mind of the general public, an image of Chinese America as “unassimilated” and “un-American,” possibly threatening and thus deserving racial prejudices. In this sense, Johnson not only celebrates *The Woman Warrior* as a feminist text, but she also views it as a text that “represents” inherent inferiority of Chinese American culture.

Jeffery Paul Chan, chairperson of Asian American Studies Program at San Francisco State University, is justified for his angry refutation of Johnson’s arrogant generalization on Chinese American society, which Chan argues has been much assimilated and discriminated against. Chan charges Johnson with celebrating feminism at the expense of Chinese American history. In other words, in prioritizing gender while ignoring race, classic feminism does not transcend beyond but conforms to racist thinking. On the other hand, Johnson’s simplistic and apathetic response to this particular issue only makes the problem more serious, showing clearly how racism is closely tied to the framework of representational inevitability, concerning literary works by people of color. Chan’s refutation about Chinese American culture does not persuade Johnson to look at her perspective critically, but rather it makes her more defensive of her argument on Chinese America. Determined to prove that her version of the Chinese American culture is more accurate and thus more authentic, Johnson argues that many people including “doctors, hospitals, community workers, even the phone company all attest” to

the fact that “the descendants of the original nineteenth-century immigrants include people now in their eighties” do not or choose not to speak English. What Johnson says may very well be true for some Chinese Americans, although it is more likely that they do not know how to speak Chinese, as Kingston points out.¹² The heart of the matter is how Johnson as a critic should read her “fact.” Apparently, she reads it the same way that she reads Kingston, turning an exciting aspect of Chinese American life into some Orientalist generalizations, possibly unintentionally in both cases.

Yet the absence of intention, combined with the actual racist harm, is more dangerous a problem than the intentional one since Johnson simply denies and dismisses the otherwise important matter. She passionately defends herself, saying that she was “simply noting what I have never before heard disputed,” instead of thinking seriously of all the cultural and racial implications of her “unintentional” notion.¹³ The lack of intention should never be an excuse to justify racism but a humble reminder of how pervasive racism has been, which feminists (especially today) should be aware of.

Chan rightly points out the role that publishers play in producing certain Chinese American literature and clearly disapproves that *The Woman Warrior* is published as autobiography rather than fiction. He states that “[a] white reading public will rave over ethnic biography while ignoring a Chinese-American’s literary art” like Frank Chin’s *Chickencoop Chinaman*, accusing Kingston of catering to white readers and passing fiction for facts. Chan believes that Kingston “has created a wonderful, and artful fiction drawn from a sensibility shaped by a white culture predisposed to fanciful caricatures of a Shangri-la four thousand years wise, but feudally binding.”¹⁴ On the other hand, Johnson’s observation that Chan simply wishes that Kingston had written her book

differently is quite to the point. While I agree with her upon the argument that Kingston has her artistic freedom, Johnson certainly minimizes the significance of cultural contexts, probably as a result of being a member of the privileged majority in a largely racist and sexist American society.

Although Chan believes that Kingston misinterprets Chinese American terms in order to please the white readers and says that Kingston's experience is unique if it is true, he does admit that "a number of Chinese-Americans today may regard things Chinese as Kingston and Johnson suggests."¹⁵ It seems that Chan and Johnson agree that what Kingston tells in *The Woman Warrior* is true to some Chinese Americans, and the bottomline difference is how each one of them reads that information. Ironically, both consider Kingston as the representative speaking for the whole community and consequently conclude with racial and cultural generalizations for which they themselves, not Kingston, are responsible.

The Canonization of the Chinese American Female Body

The discourse of representational inevitability in the Kingston debate has much to do with the mechanism of masculinist Eurocentric American literary canon. In particular, it has a great deal to do with the way Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is canonized, namely, how the Chinese American female body in suffering is accentuated.

The facts that Kingston has to ask the question of representational relationship between an individual author and the ethnic community and that Kingston's question has been asked and answered not only by Chinese Americans but by other Americans of color are a direct result of male-centered Eurocentric discourses in American culture,

which have promoted and established a racist and sexist literary canon that foregrounds the centrality of white-maleness while paradoxically rendering white-maleness gender-neutral and racially invisible. That is, the omnipresence of white maleness has marked it with human universality and thus has unmarked it. On the other hand, male-centered Eurocentrism makes tokenism necessary to the maintenance of literary canon, which is to include a very limited number of works by White women and people of color in order to exclude the vast majority of such works by others. The long history of absence of women and people of color in American culture justifies and “naturalizes” the practice of “representational inevitability” as the most popular and legitimate approach to literary works by people of color and White women. This has likewise marked their works as either gender-specific or racially specific, which are automatically interpreted as limitation or lack, of universality and thus of legitimacy. Therefore, White/European (male) Americans are both individuals and Americans; but Americans of color can only be representatives of their specific ethnic cultures. Kingston has produced certain aspects of Chinese American tradition, which “inevitably represents” the *whole* of Chinese American experience to the American public who most likely know no Chinese American writers other than Kingston until Amy Tan in 1989.¹⁶

The lack of Chinese American representation in American literary canon is intimately related to Chinese American history of racial oppression in the United States. Until the elimination of the 1882 Chinese exclusion act in 1943 and the Immigration and Nationalization Act of 1965, Chinese Americans (Asian Americans, by extension) as a group have been historically and systematically excluded from social, political and economic spheres of the United States. The foreigner status of Chinese Americans results

from the 19th century Eurocentric imperialism practiced by the U.S. upon China in the wake of the Opium War. The Wangxia Treaty, signed in 1844 between the U.S. and China, not only contributed to the “large-scale Chinese immigration to America” due partially to the Chinese domestic economy “dislocated” by the Western invasion.¹⁷ It also predetermined the political and social space occupied by Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans. Different from immigrants of European origins who to a large extent had similar physiognomy and shared the legacy of Enlightenment and Christianity, the Chinese came from a country that most major Western European nations (where white immigrants came from) had conquered. Thus, Chinese immigrants had been by their looks considered as “exotic, barbaric, and alien,” unworthy of citizenship and other human rights granted to the white males. China, an enemy state, although conquered, is still potentially dangerous. It is only “natural” to have regarded Chinese immigrants “as a ‘yellow peril’ threatening to take over the land of free opportunities, displacing white European immigrants.”¹⁸

It was not until 1943 that the 1882 exclusion act against Chinese immigrants was abolished as a result of “political exigency [that] required that America and China become allies in the war against Japan” during the Second World War.¹⁹ However, the 1943 revision and the later 1965 law have not changed the symbolic “alien” status of Chinese Americans who are seen “as persons and populations to be integrated in to the national political sphere and as the contradictory, confusing, unintelligible elements to be marginalized and returned to their alien origins.” Although they are formally and officially granted citizen rights for even generations, they are always the ‘foreigner-within.’²⁰ The recent discourse of model minority, although underscoring the

achievements of Chinese and other Asian Americans, obscures structural racism within the U.S. social, cultural, economic and political systems. It also assigns Asian Americans a space that can only be “minor” and marginal to the central space occupied by “real” Americans.

Under these social political circumstances is an exclusive-inclusive literary and cultural tokenism, in which the inclusion of a very limited number of Chinese American authors justifies the exclusion of many others. Despite systematic alienation and oppression, Chinese Americans do have their agency and have acted aggressively for social transformation. Especially since the 1960s, Chinese Americans have been redefining their ethnicity and reclaiming their nation in their own terms. One of the effective tools used is writing into the traditional white male literary canon, a task that is challenging particularly as a result of literary tokenism, which on the one hand limits the few number of Chinese American texts available to the mainstream audience and on the other produces a “natural” equation of any ethnic text with the totality of that ethnic experience and reality.

Chinese American literature that consciously defines the space of Chinese America was politically invisible until in the 1960s. Against the new and almost blank Chinese American cultural background, Kingston’s 1976 *The Woman Warrior* “represents” a groundbreaking historical moment for both Chinese American literature and Chinese American cultural tradition. As the only Chinese American author who then enjoyed a mainstream readership, Kingston is not only a pioneer writer for Chinese America, but she represents “the” Chinese American experience. Although there have been other prominent writers (Frank Chin, Jeffrey Chan, for example) and works

(especially the anthology of *Aiiieeeee!*), they are not nearly as popular among the mainstream readers as Kingston. In a sense, *The Woman Warrior* has “become” the tradition, the only tradition most Americans know about Chinese America.

The canonization of *The Woman Warrior* certainly makes Kingston’s position more precarious. For once the representational relationship between the ethnic author and his/her community is established and agreed upon, it becomes a site of competition for its definitions and meanings. The inclusion of Kingston into the American canon implies the danger of racist tokenism advanced by the dominant discourse, which does not (intend to) focus either on the author or on the group the author supposedly represents. Instead, the focus is on the “white mainstream America” and its “conscious effort to include” a group other than that of white males. Consequently, the presence of Kingston in literary canon is believed to result from the benevolence of the white dominant culture, instead of her own individual artistic talents.²¹ She is and must be her ethnic community. As Shirley Geok-lin Lim says, “[n]o one asks if a William Buckley would be invited to speak at such an institution [as Brown University] if he did not represent a white male elitist conservative group each time he opens his mouth.”

However, “[t]hose on the margins or outside the circles of power will always be questioned on their credentials to participate in inner-circle conversations and will be made to wear identification tags to authenticate their authority to be present.”²²

Therefore, Kingston, viewed in this light, not only represents the Chinese American tradition, but her presence also suggests the inclusion of Chinese Americans and Chinese American culture into the white mainstream America, thus demonstrating the color-blind

and race-blind ideal of American democracy. Re-orientalized and appropriated, Kingston's work is read against Chinese America, whose sexist and other bizarre customs and traditions are "universally" accepted, assumed and confirmed. As a result, the Chinese American culture is seen as exotic, foreign, and barbaric and it can only be "saved" and "redeemed" by the great White male American civilization.

It is little wonder that the most well-known and most debated is "No Name Woman," in which Kingston describes in detail an aunt's tragic journey of sexuality from a newly wed whose husband labored in America, to a village outcast who, impregnated by a rapist or her lover, is raided by fellow villages and ends both her and her newborn's lives in a family well. From her love of beauty to her secret desire, from the rape of her body to the violation of her home, from the childbirth to the final jump into the well, Kingston accentuates the female body in suffering and the violent repression of female sexuality in pre-revolutionary China. Undoubtedly, the wide anthologization of this bizarre and violent story feeds on the imagination of the mainstream American public, who had already treated Chinese Americans as "yellow peril" with negative, "inscrutable," evil and dangerous cultural and racial images like Fu Man-chu and Charlie Chan. According to David Leiwei Li, "No Name Woman" is likely the only Chinese American or Asian American literary text read by many college students:

Though perhaps politically unconscious, the desire to appropriate by way of assimilation prompts fatally reductive and essentialist readings that have made, to the best of my knowledge, the "No Name Woman" chapter almost *the* canonical elect of *The Woman Warrior*, *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*, *The Harper American Literature*, *Crossing Cultures: Readings for Composition*, *The Bedford Reader*, *The Conscious Reader*, and *The Harvest Reader* all choose to anthologize "No Name Woman."²³

The literary canonization of Kingston is in fact a political canonization of Chinese American female body, which in the Eurocentric masculinist gaze signals, supposedly, the inherent superiority of European America to Chinese America. The representational inevitability in the Kingston controversy is really about how the Chinese American female body means, particularly the body of “No Name Woman.” On the other hand, literary canonization is always a cultural and discursive product to be deconstructed. It is in literary criticism that meanings of the Chinese American female body, often contradictory, come into existence, and that literary canon is transformed.

Authenticity, Autobiography, Gender and Genre

The competitive production of social and political significance of the Chinese American female body is embodied in the heated exchange of criticism on autobiography as a genre. One of the most important aspects of the Kingston debate focuses on the definition, function and implication of autobiography as a form of art. In particular, they debate on authenticity, that is, whether and how Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, as an autobiography, represents or misrepresents the truth of Chinese American culture and/or the truth of (Chinese American) women. Specifically, what does the female body, that of “No Name Woman” included, mean? What can it mean? What meanings can be read into it, in a gender context or in a race context? If nothing else, it is upon the critical significance of the Chinese American female body that various critics have agreed. In producing meanings of the female body through reading, critics exercise their control of that body.

What heats up the Kingston debate on female autobiography is the controversial

categorization of *Woman Warrior* as an autobiographical thus non-fictional text when the author herself considers it closer to fiction than to autobiography. Postmodernist and deconstructionist feminist critics are fascinated by the combination of fantasy and facts in Kingston's book and applaud Kingston for her innovated employment and redefinition of the genre. However, Asian American critics—nationalists and feminists—are more concerned with the social and cultural consequences of this categorization and attack Kingston for “selling out” and catering to the white audience with distorted and exaggerated misrepresentation of Chinese American tradition as misogynistic, cruel, backward and exotic. While Asian American cultural nationalists see autobiography as a racist genre and attack Kingston for passing fiction for autobiography, mainstream and Asian American feminists argue that autobiography closely relates to the female gender and is in itself fictional. In the midst of heated debates, different and contradictory versions of Kingston and *The Woman Warrior* are produced and circulated: Kingston as a feminist, as a racist feminist, as a cultural traitor and as an Asian American feminist. Meanwhile, feminists and cultural nationalists are being defined too, often too narrowly and with much prejudice.

Sidonie Smith's “Filiality and Woman's Autobiographical Storytelling” is an excellent place to start as it touches all the issues later to be debated upon. Smith puts Kingston in the tradition of female autobiography of the 15th-19th centuries that accentuates woman's self-identity through words, texts and discourses:

For Kingston, then, as for the woman autobiographer generally, the hermeneutics of self-representation can never be divorced from cultural representations of woman that delimit the nature of her access to the word and the articulation of her own desire. Nor can interpretation be divorced from her orientation toward the mother, who, as her point of origin, commands the tenuous negotiation of identity and difference in a drama of filiaty that reaches

through the daughters' subjectivity to her textual self-authoring.²⁴

Pointing out the "fictional possibilities of female selfhood," Smith argues autobiography is intimately and intricately connected to woman's voice against silence, which explains the fact that many women take to this form of genre. Thus Smith presents to the readers the "fictional possibilities" of autobiography, blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction. Considering *The Woman Warrior* "an autobiography about women's autobiographical storytelling," Smith believes that it "powerfully [captures] the relationship of gender to genre."²⁵ Although Smith mentions the different circumstances that women of color are faced with, she for the most part focuses solely on gender and on establishing arguments that connect, rather than divide, women of different cultural backgrounds. It is this rather typical classic feminist standpoint that draws fire from different sides and contributes to the later revisions and expansions of feminisms to view gender in relation to, instead of being separate from, other social issues and factors such as race, class, nationality, etc.

The body of "No Name Woman" and the body of the legendary Fa Mu Lan are thus signs of gender tension and proofs of female power against male domination, a universal condition for women. Another example of Eurocentric feminist reading of Kingston is Leslie Rabine's "No Lost Paradise: Social Gender and Symbolic Gender in the Writings of Maxine Hong Kingston," in which Rabine draws upon theories of French feminist psychoanalysis and concentrates solely on the issue of gender transgression. Stating that speaking is primary and patriarchal while writing is secondary and feminine, Rabine views Kingston's writing and re-writing as rebellious against the traditional repressive talk-stories and against the "complicity between logcentrism and

phallocentrism.”²⁶

While Eurocentric feminists celebrate Kingston and female autobiography, many other critics quickly point out the inadequacy and danger of that position within a larger sexist and racist American cultural context. To Asian American cultural nationalists, autobiography is white and racist and thus should be condemned. Frank Chin, one of the key representatives of cultural nationalists, argues that autobiography as a genre developed out of Christian confession of sins and believes that “[a] Chinaman can’t write an autobiography without selling out.”²⁷ On the one hand, the strong religious connotation of autobiography valorizes Christianity as essentially and ultimately superior to other different civilizations and cultures, which means either a denial or distortion of the non-Christian cultures—Chinese Americans here—in order to produce the sense of that superiority. On the other hand, it also signals voluntary admission of guilt for wrongdoings and therefore deserves discipline and punishment. Striving to fight for citizenship and rights that his people deserve, Chin finds autobiography as a literary form unproductive, even destructive in that the ethnic autobiographer acts as a cultural tour guide of the exotic imagined “realities” of Chinese America for the white American audience whose preconception about Chinese American culture as well as sense of superiority to Chinese America are not threatened but confirmed. The tale of “No Name Woman” and her body in pain prove for the mainstream White readers the guilt of Chinese America, particularly the inferiority of Chinese American men. Chin and other Asian American cultural nationalists lament that while “[t]he Christian Chinese American autobiography is the only Chinese American literary tradition.”²⁸ They assert that writing in the tradition of autobiography signals a betrayal of the Asian American community,

particularly a betrayal of the Asian American manhood and heroism that are much needed and still in the process of construction.²⁹

Asian American cultural nationalists fiercely condemn the fictional part of *The Woman Warrior*, and ironically the female body is again the center of attention. Chin is outraged with discrepancies of the almost unrecognizable Chinese myth of Fa Mu Lan in Kingston's book, compared to his translated version of the same tale.³⁰ Fa Mu Lan was the legendary woman warrior who took her father's place, went to war for ten years, and was welcomed home as a hero, a loyal daughter who fulfilled her duty to her father. However, she did not have any words on her back. It was Yue Fei, a famous general of Song Dynasty, on whose back his mother inscribed four words—jing (complete, extreme) zhong (loyal) bao (dedicated to serve) guo (nation)—to remind him of his obligation to the country due to invasion by the kingdom of Jin in Northern China. She was not married at the time, neither was she pregnant, let alone giving birth to a child in between battles. She did not go to the mountains for the training to be a swordswoman, and of course, there is no mention of menstruation. The femaleness of Fa Mu Lan's body is thus fabricated. As a result, the emphasis of gender in Kingston's talk-story is a distortion of the authentic tale. In fact, Esther Ghymn believes that Kingston's legend is a mixture of Chinese and Western cultural traditions. She argues that Kingston borrows from the tradition of Robin Hood "as there is a journey, exile, rebirth, and ultimate victory" and that the insistence of both a man and a woman as the trainers who lives close to nature is clearly Taoist, although the details of the trainings are influenced by Kong Fu movies. It also alludes to Buddhism in which, while other animals offer their foods to the hungry Budda, a rabbit burns itself in a fire and therefore turns itself a meal.³¹

Chin publishes an essay titled “The Most Popular Book” that presents a literary and cultural debate on a short tale “The Unmanly Warrior,” in which the famous French heroine Joan of Arc is in fact a man of six-foot-four and 225 pounds forced by his parents to disguise as a woman to seduce influential young men at the royal court. He later “mounted an army of masked women fed up with the silliness of court life that threatened to topple France, determined to make it a nation ruled by women rescued from the flames of French male bigotry.”³² The story ends with Joan being tortured—castrated and breast-augmented—and burnt to death, which once for all ends the ritual of women burning in France. Chin compares this completely untrue short story with Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, and creates a parody of the contradictory literary and cultural criticisms on *The Woman Warrior* in “The Most Popular Book in China:”

The old French people of Frenchtown on the edge of Canton didn’t like the book. They didn’t have Smith Mei-jing’s grasp of the Chinese language, the Chinese who loved her book said. The people of old Frenchtown said her book falsified history. They are conservative and old-fashioned and don’t appreciate good writing, the Chinese who loved the book said.... The French girl is writing not history, but art, the Chinese who loved the book said, and continued: She is writing a work of imagination authenticated by her personal experience.... The French people of Frenchtown said, her own experience is an insane, paranoid distortion of basic knowledge common to all French.... And the Chinese who loved her book said, her personal experience was authentically French and her unique understanding of both the French and the Chinese views of life brings the Chinese the closest, most human understanding of the French ever produced in the Chinese language... Sour grapes, the Chinese who loved her book said, she’s not writing history or about history, therefore the accuracy of any of her history is irrelevant to the question of her artistry, authenticity, or psychological reality, her Chinese admirers said.³³

Chin puts Kingston in the same category with “Fu Manchu, Charlie Chan, Pearl Buck, Shangri-la of the Thirties.” He asserts that “Whites have been using Chinese as the metaphorical out for all their perversions and debilitating insecurities since the thirteenth-

century” and that Kingston confirms “the white fantasy that everything sick and sickening about the white self-image is really Chinese.”

Chin’s argument is powerful and provocative. However, one thing should be kept in mind. The original ballad is in verse and rather brief, which leaves a great deal of space for imagination, and imagination is exactly what Kingston has done to envision the legendary heroine. Kingston’s revision of or addition to the original creates a heroine who fights for justice, in addition to being a loyal daughter. In this sense, Chin’s emphasis on the original plot is an attempt to domesticate the heroine and keep the female body in check. His statement that Kingston’s source of inspiration is not Chinese American history but white fantasy is over the limits. In fact, it is more accurate to say that it is white fantasy, not *The Woman Warrior*, that has produced racist “misreadings” on Kingston.

Asian American feminists defend Kingston while criticizing both mainstream feminists and Asian American cultural nationalists. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong disagrees with Chin on Kingston and on autobiography. She argues that many accusations of Kingston are oversimplified statements on the origin of autobiography and its implications. In fact, Wong presents evidence that autobiography as a genre has been practiced since the first century A.D. while confessional writing could be found in traditional Chinese literature.³⁴

Moreover, Wong points out that Kingston is not a “trustworthy cultural guide” but is barely more enlightened than an ‘outsider’ would be” as a result of “having been born and raised in ‘ghost country’ without benefit of explicit parental instruction in cultural

practices.” As far as the charge that Kingston violates Chinese American history and fact is concerned, Wong quotes Debra Woo that cultural ignorance has been an “authentic” experience for many Chinese Americans. She suggests that the readers should view the book as “a sort of meditation on what it means to be Chinese American,” for which the heroine takes advantage of whatever is available and manipulates and appropriates them until they make sense to her life.³⁵ On the other hand, Wong reminds people that there are different versions of the Fa Mu Lan legend so that Kingston’s talk-story is only one variation of it.

To the argument that Kingston offers a fictional personal representation of the Chinese American life that caters to the stereotypical taste of the white readers, Wong first points out that “The Woman Warrior ‘problem’ is seen to rest ultimately on the readers, not the author” and “the basis for denouncing *The Woman Warrior* is pragmatic, response-contingent, and reader-specific.” As a result, Kingston should not be held responsible for “the misreadings” of her readers.³⁶ Moreover, Wong argues that autobiography, despite its claim to truth and accuracy, is fiction in that the ethnic autobiography is “obligated” to sacrifice anything that will not promote positive portrayal of the ethnic community:

Should individual experience fail to be homologous to collective history, personal authority must yield to ideological imperatives, and the details of the narrative must be manipulated to present an improved picture. According to this logic, the ethnic woman autobiographer victimized by sexism must be ready to suppress potentially damaging (to the men, that is) material; to do less is to jeopardize the united front and prostitute one’s integrity for the sake of white approval.³⁷

Thus, Wong in a different way confirms the postmodernist feminist understanding of fictional autobiography. However, the discussion on the “truth” of Kingston’s experience

and “true” definition of autobiography does not solve the problem of feminism vs. cultural nationalism, neither does it change the assumption that Kingston speaks for the whole Chinese America except that Kingston is not responsible for all different readings of her book.

While other critics focus on attacking the narrowly defined feminism and Asian American cultural nationalism, King-kok Cheung suggests radical revision of both terms in her essay “The Woman Warrior versus the Chinaman Pacific: Must a Chinese American Critic Choose between Feminism and Heroism?” Instead of finding feminism and cultural nationalism (or heroism in Cheung’s term) exclusive and contradictory, Cheung encourages the critics to bridge the two by not falling into the trap of oppressive reverse discourses. Cheung first declares the necessity to investigate gender in relation to race and argues that “it is impossible...to tackle the gender issues in the Chinese American cultural terrain without delving into the historically enforced ‘feminization’ of Chinese American men, without confronting the dialectics of racial stereotypes and nationalist reactions or, above all, without wrestling with diehard notions of masculinity and femininity in both Asian and Western cultures.”³⁸

On the argument that Kingston passes fiction for autobiography, Cheung asserts that genre is always gendered and that Chin’s attack of Kingston’s “misrepresentation” of the [male] community puts him in line with “those white viewers who reduce works of art by ethnic authors to sociohistorical documentary.” She emphasizes that the key issue is not to choose or split between feminism and heroism but to avoid ‘reverse discourse’ and eradicate both white and male supremacy, through re-evaluating and re-inventing Chinese American heroic tradition and as well as “[e]xpanding feminist frame of

reference.”³⁹ On the other hand, we do not have to accept the stereotypical white interpretations of ethnic heritage but should try to re-appropriate or reclaiming the heritage with new explanations. What we need is mutual empathy among Asian American men and women, instead of censoring the writers, and heroism does not have to oppose to feminism:

If we ask them to write with a vigilant eye against possible misappropriation by white readers or against possible offense to “Asian American manhood,” however, we will end up implicitly sustaining racial and sexual hierarchies. All of us need to be conscious of our “complicity with the gender ideologies” of patriarchy, whatever its origins, and to work toward notions of gender and ethnicity that are nonhierarchical, nonbinary, and nonprescriptive; that can embrace tensions rather than perpetuate divisions. To reclaim cultural traditions without getting bogged down in the mire of traditional constraints, to attack stereotypes without falling prey to their binary opposites, to chart new topographies for manliness and womanliness, will surely demand genuine heroism.⁴⁰

“Genuine heroism” is not easy to achieve. It seems that feminists, especially Asian American feminists, have successfully complicated the issue of gender with other significant social and cultural factors such as race, while Asian American cultural nationalists are the only group of critics who draw attack for their dismissal of gender. However, many Asian American feminists, when asked to choose between fighting for gender and fighting for race, have decided on racial struggle. The underlining message that we feminists, not just nationalists, often automatically assume is that we somehow subscribe to the same binary notion of gender and race being mutually exclusive, in addition to the un/conscious acceptance that gender as a analytical category is dispensable. The way of seeing and reading must be radically changed, but not by simply adding newly “discovered” social issues to the existent structure. Instead we should question the structuring of the questions and the presentation of the problems. It is easy to

criticize Asian American cultural nationalists for their obvious lack of attention to gender issues, and it is easy to attack feminists for their overemphasis of gender. However, it is time to challenge a racist literary canonization that continues to limit readership to certain ethnic texts and perpetuate the myth of representational relation between individual writers of color and their ethnic community, which both nationalists and feminists unfortunately have not emphasized.

The mission will not be completed unless we not only add more Chinese American texts to the canon but more significantly change our way of reading these texts. The availability of more texts may not necessarily engender new ways of reading. On the contrary, the masculinist Eurocentric structure of American literary canon promotes the inclusion of similar Chinese American texts, which, in the discourse of representational inevitability, may very well reinforce racist gaze of Chinese America. Diverse Chinese American literary texts will be more easily available only if we are willing to read beyond inevitable representation. The way of reading must be changed.

I agree with Sheng-mei Ma's observation that these male critics' "retaliation is motivated by a wounded male ego, signifying male rage over being consistently ignored by the American academy and market."⁴¹ It demonstrates the frustration of the loud singular presence of Kingston in the consciousness of the American readers, who nonetheless haven't turned their ears to the screams of either the 1974 *IIIIIIIIII! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* and the 1991 *The Big Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Chinese and Japanese American Literature*, both coedited by Chin, Chang, Inada and Wong. The solution to this particular agony these writers and critics experience is that they have to change their ways of seeing. In Ma's words, "[it] might be more sensible for

Chin and other like-minded writers to take on the literary establishment and the mainstream sensibility rather than to vent their fury on Asian American feminists.”⁴²

On the other hand, it might be more sensible for feminists to question the system of “American academy and market” than to just chastise Asian American cultural nationalists. To a large degree, Kingston’s dilemma as an Asian American writer has been produced by the lack of attention of the mainstream readers and critics to other Asian American literary works. As a result, Kingston’s textual experience has been essentialized as the only and fixed reality of Chinese America. Whether *The Woman Warrior* is considered autobiography or not, the problematic is the reductive assumption that Kingston represents the whole Chinese American cultures and that Kingston is all we need to know about Chinese America.

We should not forget, however, that Kingston’s experience is unique, not in the sense that she is different from the rest of Chinese American writers who are assumed to be somehow similar to one another, but that *The Woman Warrior* is only one of many “unique” cultural productions on Chinese America. Just as other Chinese American writers have produced their sense of Chinese American realities, Kingston has produced for her readers a Chinese American culture in her eyes. To understand the whole Chinese American traditions, critics must open themselves up to new ways of literary criticism that recognize and respect multiple possibilities and realities of Chinese American experiences offered by many different Chinese American writers such as Frank Chin. As critics we must detangle ourselves from the trap of “representational inevitability” and challenge, rather than conform to, the sexist and racist habit of reading.

This does not mean that we should ignore the fact that Kingston submitted her manuscript as fiction with a different title. She agreed, in order to promote the sale of the book, to change it for autobiography and substituted the original title for a more militant one, even though she did not believe in war and violence. In her interview with Susan Brownmiller, she frankly said that ““I guess I do think it’s closer to fiction, but whatever sells...”⁴³ Some critics note that her decision (or rather, her editor’s decision) reflects the rising power of feminist rhetoric in the 1970s, which puts Kingston back to the tradition of female autobiography of gender fighting and resistance. The comment “whatever sells” is problematic, for it shows Kingston’s compromised, at least uncritical, attitude toward the commercial culture. Yet it does foreground an issue much neglected in writing. That is, every piece of writing is meant to sell, creative or critical; and every author needs to sell for survival. The difference lies in what is being sold, the meaning of which is determined as much by the author as by the critics and readers.

Kingston’s textual meanings are even more slippery since her decision to label *The Woman Warrior* autobiography produces a confusion rather than unanimous acceptance of it. Brownmiller mentions the confusion of reviewers about whether *The Woman Warrior* is fiction or nonfiction and Kingston has on several occasions pointed out that bookstores have put it under different categories while the book has been taught in a variety of disciplines in the academia.⁴⁴ While complicating the debate even further, this matter accentuates even more the critical role of reading in the production of textual and cultural meanings.

What Kingston or *The Woman Warrior* is or is not depends on different readers. Authenticity of the text, of the author, as well as of the ethnic community is discursively

produced in literary and cultural criticism. Kingston has for her readers produced part of Chinese American traditions and at the same time she is also being produced by her readers, although different and contradictory.

The Discursive Production and Reproduction of the Kingston Debate

David Leiwei Li rightly points out that much of the debate and canonization of Kingston has been formed by the timing of the publication of *The Woman Warrior*, when feminism and racial awareness were on the rise. At a time when feminism and racial criticism seem irrelevant to a media-promoted “colorblind” equal American society, it is necessary that we revisit the debate and the issues. In fact, quite a few critics have done just that. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong devotes a case book just to *The Woman Warrior* that presents “what has happened rather than what I wished had happened or what I think should be happening” while fully aware of her own subjective position “as a scholar identifying primarily as an Asian Americanist and holding strong feminist sympathies.”⁴⁵ Laura E. Skandera-Trombley edited *Critical Essays on Maxine Hong Kingston* that “select[s] the best essays,” “reviews” and articles, representing some of the debates that are a hallmark of Kingston’s career, including a new interview that focuses on the debate on mis/reading Kingston. Both editors have presented clear historical contexts of the Kingston debate while emphasizing their feminist affiliations. On the other hand, Leslie Bow discusses “the often antagonistic relationship between feminism and nationalism [in the third world] as feminism becomes positioned as an imported Western corruption of the indigenous traditions on which anti-imperialist movements have been founded.”⁴⁶ Her research is particularly illuminating since she explores the issue of betrayal, the center of

the debate between feminism and nationalism, and argues that “this betrayal of racism, patriarchy, or repressive state constitutes a form of creative activism for Asian American women.”⁴⁷

The vast number of research on the controversy of Maxine Hong Kingston proves the significance of the debate itself. More importantly, it demonstrates an increasing urgency and necessity to make sense of it and to recognize its long-term repercussions. While drawing to different conclusions, the recent critics emphasize without exception the importance of contextualization of the debate itself as well as of the arguments on both sides. On the one hand, they acknowledge the validity of the cultural nationalist and feminist arguments under their respective historical circumstances; and on the other, they point out the limitations of each side for ignoring the interconnection of important issues such as race and gender. All of them try to view the debate as it was and as “objectively” as possible in their presentations of the pros and cons of different criticisms.

While “objectivity” is also one of my goals here, I believe that there is always some kind of “subjectivity,” if not subjective prejudice, behind our interpretation. In fact, I believe that there is no point just to trace the origin of a past debate unless it means something to us today, just like what Kingston says about talk stories and the lives of her aunts. As a feminist critic, I revisit the Kingston debate not just as an irrelevant historical event in the past. Instead, I see it as a critical case that will offer certain “ancestral help”⁴⁸ for the present and future of feminism. The Kingston debate is illuminating particularly to feminist critics in dealing with the complicated and often contradictory relationships between feminism, nationalism, consumerism and globalization.

My “subjective” final goal for this revisit is to define a new feminist way of literary and cultural reading that is not only meaningful to our interpretation of the Kingston debate *then* but also emphasizes the significance and necessity of feminist criticism *now*. Recent publications on the Kingston debate are very insightful, particularly with their emphasis of historical contexts, but most are more interested in the debate itself that happened in the past. While most of them recognize limitations on both feminist and ethnic sides of the arguments, their general lack of interest in and simplistic understanding of feminism are unsatisfactory and even condescending to me, a critic who is searching for feminist inspiration through this debate. In a way, they have reproduced some stereotypical interpretations of feminism. Our mission is thus to learn from the Kingston debate and refresh feminist rhetoric. Only by defining feminism ourselves, instead of being defined, can we deliver us out of the crisis we are in now.

Sau-ling Cynthia Wong is one of the few who clearly defines her critical position, identifying herself with feminism as well as Asian Americanism. However, since she edits a casebook that is supposed to present as it was, she can only ask her readers to draw their own conclusion about the controversy. Laura E. Skandera-Trombley provides her readers with a selection of great essays that defined the debate, covering responses and reviews in both the popular media and academia, including new retrospective interpretations and interview that tackle the issues of canonization, mis/readings, genre and most of all of the critical either/or dichotomies between feminist and ethnic studies. In a 1998 interview, Kingston was unhappy that her books “are read for political messages and with an absence of looking at the aesthetic reason,”⁴⁹ presenting the two

major approaches of reading that some critics believe to be the essence of the debate. Kingston was also “very concerned when *The Woman Warrior* came out right at the height of the feminist movement and everyone saw my work as being the epitome of a feminist book. I felt really mad about that because that’s not all that it is.”⁵⁰ Although much of the interview criticizes the “narrow” reductive readings of all Kingston’s “texts,” it does not spell out the problem as clearly as in Kingston’s own article “Cultural Misreadings.” Therefore, it does not enlighten the readers with any new revolutionary approaches besides reiterating what others have been saying, especially concerning the meanings of the term “feminism.” Instead of complicating feminism by explaining its changes and development, Skandera-Trombley seems to simply dismiss the term altogether. In response to Kingston’s anger for being interpreted as “just feminist” because of the historical circumstances of the publication of *The Woman Warrior*, Skandera-Trombley says: “Right, but at that time for that particular group it may have hit a category that they were looking for, which I don’t think exist anymore.”⁵¹ Although she recognizes that “the criticism has grown since then,” she does not clarify her point.

The most popular interpretation of the Kingston debate is to view it as a conflict between two radically different approaches to art, either art as a necessity for community survival or art as an individual aesthetic experience, according to Leslie Bow. Xiaohuang Yin draws upon William Wei and presents similar artistic approaches, the socio-ideological approach that emphasizes moral, social and political responsibility of the authors to present “authentic,” as opposed to “fake,” Chinese American history and realities, and the individual-aesthetic approach that accentuates personal creative freedom enjoyed by other mainstream authors. However, they draw very different conclusions,

with Bow celebrating feminist betrayal and Yin deconstructing the importance of gender.

Yin terms the Kingston debate as “the war of words” between Chin and Kingston and he seems to be most optimistic as he believes that “it is a sign of the maturing of Chinese American literature.” Yin argues that the debate is based on “individual views and personal interests rather than along a rigid gender or class line or as an attempt to follow fashions in mainstream society.” As a result, he states that the debate represents the diversity of Chinese American cultures and literatures, which have “become an organic part of the Chinese American experience.”⁵²

Yin has made a valid point in directing our attention to the individual aspect of the debate, which demonstrates a diversity of Chinese American cultures and experiences. Nonetheless, the role that mainstream institutions and academia have played is also central to the shaping of the debate, just as David Leiwei Li and Jinqi Lin have said. Moreover, one danger to name the debate as a personal feud between Kingston and Chin is to have reduced the cultural, social and political complexity of the debate that, to a large degree, embodies contradictions in American culture. It misleads the readers into thinking that the debate concerns only the Chinese Americans, having nothing to do with anybody else. As a result, although Yin does say later that the mainstream culture should be blamed for Orientalizing, primitizing, exoticizing, effeminizing Chinese American men, it does not change the big picture that it is only an internal conflict within Chinese American community.

Yin disapproves Chin’s anger at and personal attack of women writers like Kingston, arguing that “Asian women are favored for the same reason that Asian men are rejected—to serve the interests of white superiority.” He refutes the accusation of racial

selling out and catering to the mainstream white readers on the part of Kingston and believes that Chinese women writers are popular as a result of increasing interest in women's issues and multiculturalism in America. He directs our attention to Chinese American women authors who write in Chinese, specifically for the Chinese-language American community, and yet are more popular than male writers.⁵³ Although Yin defends Kingston and believes that "Kingston is one of the women writers who acknowledges male contributions to Chinese American life,"⁵⁴ he criticizes Kingston for accentuating the issue of gender in *The Woman Warrior*.

Yin emphasizes the significant role played by race that denied male privileges to early Chinese American men and made them as powerless as Chinese American women, and situates the portrayal of sexism and sexist Chinese male characters by Kingston within the context of hate crime against Asian American men. He links negative literary representation of Asian men to racial violence against Asian men and argues that we must take into serious consideration the damaging impact of "the portrayal of Fu Manchu-style 'bad Chinese guys' in the literary work of Chinese women:"

Because the depiction of "Oriental" men as villains is still socially, politically, and culturally acceptable in American life, and Asian men are more likely than the women to be victims of racially motivated violence, it is possible that the negative role of Chinese men in work by women of their own race could further stereotypes and perpetuate other damaging images.

Yin supports his opinion with Shawn Hsu Wong's observation of a lack of positive and active images of Asian American men as "husbands, fathers or lovers" and of abundant portrayal of them as either low-class serving persons like "gardeners," "houseboys," and "cooks" or evil figures like "ruthless foreign businessmen" or incompetent "martial-arts specialists who in recent years can't even beat an Italian-

American teenager known as the Karate Kid.” Wong believes that most Asian women students (at the University of Washington where he teaches Asian American studies) are influenced by these distortions—“confusion, racism, and contradictions that surround the image of Asian American men in the media” and as a result their impressions of Asian men are rather “unfavorable.”⁵⁵

Instead of seeing the connection between race and gender issues, Yin decides to write gender off. He argues that gender historically has not been the most important to either Chinese or Chinese Americans. According to his research and personal experiences, he thinks that Chinese society was divided more by class than by gender. For example, the foot-binding practice was considered more an upper-class luxury that cannot be afforded by and done to poor peasant women since they were expected to labor. Meanwhile, upper-class women often enjoyed more freedom and education, which accounted for the outstanding poetic achievements of Li Qingzhao (1084-1156) and for the fact that “Chinese literary history records 3,500 women poets in the two dynasties of Ming and Qing alone (1366-1911). Yin cites the example of the much quoted female “I”—nu—translated by Kingston as “slave” and refuted that Chinese men of lower social status also referred to themselves similarly like “xiaoren [a worthless person] or nucai [slaves].”⁵⁶

It is valid for Yin to point out the importance of class in Chinese and Chinese American society. However, the importance of class does not rule out the importance of gender. In fact, his observations are perfect examples for the interrelatedness of gender and class since gender often functions with other social and political factors. In a sense, Yin indirectly accuses Kingston of misrepresenting the real problems of the Chinese

Americans. He does not solve the problem. Writing gender off means to write off the feminist energy in Kingston's text, making the debate invisible.

Leslie Bow on the other hand captures the feminist essence and possibility in women's betrayal and connects it to the politics of sexuality and body. In her opinion, "ethnic and national affiliation are determined in part by conflicts over how sexuality is performed, potentially situating the female body as a register of international and domestic political struggle, as a site of national divisions and loyalties."⁵⁷ As a result of being "symbolic boundary markers for ethnic and national affiliations, women embody ethnic authenticity, patriotism, and class solidarity—and their reputation." Bow does not see the two approaches to art as just oppositional. Instead, she sees the individualistic aesthetic approach to art, or art as extravagance, as a deliberate feminist betrayal that protests against racism and sexism within Chinese America and America. In other words, Kingston's individual creativity and sometimes wild imagination/fabrication have betrayed the notion that art must necessarily serve the interest of the ethnic community as a whole, which may require the artist to create positive Asian American characters against oppressive and repressive Eurocentric male American society.

Leslie Bow has provided an important feminist perspective on the Kingston debate. Her argument of betrayal as a source of female power is inspiring and empowering, although she does not adequately deal with the purpose of feminist betrayal, which is not to send negative messages that may help justify for some racist sentiments and violence against Asian Americans. On the contrary, feminist betrayal of repressive nationalist traditions is to deconstruct it in order to refresh Chinese American culture and remake American traditions, in which freedom of the female body is confirmed rather

than denied. In other words, a new tradition can only be made outside the confinement of the old one, and betrayal is a first and necessary step.

Besides arguments on the two different artistic approaches, contextualization or historicization is also considered extremely important in understanding the Kingston debate. Jinqi Lin's *Narrating Nationalism: Ideology and Form in Asian American Literature* is especially enlightening for its contextualization of Asian American cultural nationalism, which he sees closely related to the 1974 *Aiiieeeee!* that promotes an 'Asian American cultural integrity' and sensibility.⁵⁸ As a result, the term itself has its own historical limitations and contingencies. While regretting that the editors of *Aiiieeeee!* have not explored the social, political and historical construction of racial gendering even though they ironically used the term 'feminization' to describe racial violence done to Asian American men, Ling admits that their simplification of the complexities of Asian American existence as well as their desire for a racial unity

was also historically contingent because it attempted to turn the temporary lack of articulated ethnic, gender, cultural, and sexual heterogeneity with the Asian American community into a unidimensional mobilization of race-based resistance. (I therefore do not see the suppression of these diverse interests in the community as *entirely* the result of Asian American cultural nationalism; rather, a thorough investigation of such suppression must involve a consideration of its role in relation to institutional power in the period in question.)⁵⁹

Lin insightfully argues for the continuity of Asian American literature in their complementary, rather than contradictory, articulations of the nation of Asian America. In other words, new or contemporary Asian American literature do not inherently resist and rebel earlier works but different "social conditions" make it possible for new Asian American writers to envision something not readily available to their predecessors.

Illuminating as he is, Lin does not bother too much with situating feminism in its own specific historical contexts and conditions, although feminism and Asian American feminism have played a major role in critiquing Asian American nationalism. In a way, this negligence of feminist issues shows a continuous apathy and hostility in academia and popular culture towards feminism, often dismissed as biased and limited. On the other hand, the preference of race over gender confirms the either/or binary of feminism and nationalism that started the Kingston debate in the first place.

David Leiwei Li also contextualizes Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, focusing on the relationship between creativity and commerce, between Kingston's writing and the mainstream culture. Unlike the optimistic Xiaohuang Yin, Li argues that Kingston profits monetarily and politically from *The Woman Warrior*, with the mainstream white audience in mind. According to Li, Kingston is a "master" of 'rhetorical strategies of capitalism and Christianity' that twists the truth of her ethnic realities for the purpose of selling and profiting. Li relates Houston Baker's criticism on Ralph Ellison to Kingston:

If the folk artist is to turn a profit from his monumental creative energies (which are often counteractive, or inersive, vis-à-vis Anglo American culture),...[h]e must, in essence, sufficiently modify his folk forms (and amply advertise himself) to merchandize such forms as commodities on the *artistic* market. The folk artist may even have to don a mask that distorts what he knows is genuine self in order to make his product commensurate with a capitalist market-place.⁶⁰

Li points out that Kingston deliberately mistranslate *gui*, a Chinese term referring to the Westerners, into a neutral "ghost" instead of the original much harsh and hostile "devil," making the white audience comfortable and guilt free while reading the miseries of Asian Americans. Moreover, Kingston directs the readers' attention outward to China and China's exotic and primitive problems, instead of America where Chinese Americans

reside. This shift of focus, with some bizarre tales, not only appropriates the already widely circulated Orientalist imaging of China but refreshes and reinforces it, particularly when it was published during the time of the beginning of U.S.-China relations when the American public was even more curious about the mysterious nation and people.

Kingston's gaze toward China is in direct conflict with Asian American nationalism of the 1970s, which tries to create Asian America that is rooted in the United States, not Asia. Asian American nationalist goal is to "[reclaim] the United States as the unambiguous geocultural site of Asian American self-definition." That is, Asian American nationalists "not only assumed a conscious American national identity that takes into account the historicity and commonality of Asian experience in the United States, but also rejected lingering intra-Asian animosity from the land of origin and nostalgic political allegiances to ancestral countries."⁶¹ Thus, Kingston's focus on China means to Chin not only a departure of their "real" nation, but a departure from the "real" Chinese American experiences and struggles against racism in their "real" home, which is the United States instead of China.

No doubt Li's presentation on Kingston's catering to the taste of mainstream American audience is thought-provocative, but it seems to go back to the root problem of representation and misrepresentation. On the other hand, the controversy of *The Woman Warrior* is "an instant power contest between the dominant culture and the ethnic community for both the authority and agency of Asian American articulation" and the "central" part of the debate is "the definitional struggle of 'Asian America.'"⁶² Li reminds people that Asia has been a discursively constructed home space of Other (vis-à-vis the West) and that Asia, not America, "is supposed to epitomize and embody *the* natural

experience and essence of Asian Americans.”⁶³ He argues that mainstream feminist critics, in their eagerness to fit the text into their gender analysis and with a lack of knowledge of and interest in Asian America, have produced Orientalist discourse of Asia America that confines Asian Americans to a barbaric, primitive and exotic Asia. While it is certainly true that Orientalism is practiced and confirmed in the name of feminism, Li neglects to mention new developments within feminism since then. Neither does he discuss any critiques by Asian American feminists who are keenly aware of Orientalist reductive readings of Kingston as well as of the significance of gender. Imagining and protecting the nation of Asian America, Li dismisses the importance or relevance of gender and defines the nation in opposition to gender and feminism. Consequently, the dilemma between nationalism and feminism stays and is confirmed, rather than eliminated.

While many critics understand the importance of the cultural production of textual meanings, it is Jinqi Lin who spells out clearly the responsibility of the critics in the Kingston debate. Interestingly, he connects Asian American cultural nationalist emphasis on ethnic authenticity with the mainstream Western Orientalist readings of people of color. On the one hand, he considers “problematic” the “distinction between ‘the real’ and ‘the fake’ in Asian American literary expression” by Asian American cultural nationalist critics such as Frank Chin and Jeffery Chan, since that distinction “implicitly reflects their continued preoccupation with survival and ethnic solidarity as a political necessity for Asian Americans in contemporary America.”⁶⁴ On the other hand, Lin argues that the misunderstanding and misappropriating of the ethnic texts by the majority

readers have much to do with the Asian American cultural nationalist approach to Asian American literature. For the strategy of ethnic authenticity often equates literary representation with facts,

leading naïve readers to a reductionist overemphasis on the documentary aspect of Asian American literary works and reinforces mainstream assumptions that ethnic writing is generally more factual than literary, more political than artful, and hence an embodiment of an unmediated and uninflected art of naïve representation. Yet, when ethnic writers experiment with alternative literary modes, they take the risk that mainstream culture will misinterpret their positions, especially through the application of conventional cultural codes to elements of a work that invite misreading simply because the text assumes rather than provides the knowledge needed to contextualize their implications. As members of an emergent culture, Asian American writers must often face mainstream readers with little knowledge of Asian American history and experience, and influenced by assimilationist and other either/or conceptual categories.⁶⁵

Consequently, Lin asserts the critical significance of the critics in the production of the controversy while stating that “a constructive reconciliation between the two [competing claims—ethnic solidarity & personal vision] lies ultimately not in the ethnic writer’s own intentional efforts but rather in the work’s critical reception in discursive reading formations.”⁶⁶

Lin does not completely throw away the concept of authenticity but asks the critics to contextualize authenticity “within the matrix of a text’s reading environment, its self-enunciation, and the historical condition of its construction.”⁶⁷ He therefore argues that the critics should take responsibilities for their readings and be aware of their own limitations and possible violence imposed on the texts being read. He urges the critics to produce more alternative reading codes to limit misappropriation of the ethnic texts and the reproduction of the dominant culture, to pay attention to the specific social and cultural conditions and unequal power relations that constrain certain published Asian

American literary works, instead of reading against some abstract and/or stereotypical definition of Asian America and unfairly as well as unrealistically expecting a particular work at any time to treat adequately all the issue we deem important today such as race, gender, imperialism, class, etc. However, “the articulation of individual Asian American writers at given historical moments” does not equate with “the actual presence of fully realized Asian American agency.”⁶⁸ That is, there is still distance between the discursive and the material, between theory and practice. Lin criticizes Lisa Lowe and other postmodernists for romanticizing “difference” and ignoring ‘*fundamental power imbalance*’ since it is one thing to celebrate cultural hybridity in discourse and another to really live in-between spaces.⁶⁹ Lin blames mainstream academia for it, linking it to “institutional power, cultural hegemony, and the upward mobility intellectuals have gained from the emphasis on academic theories of difference.”⁷⁰

The fundamental problem of these interpretations is the assumed conflict between women and the nation, as a result of a confusion of nationalism with the nation. Consequently, gender is conveniently sacrificed although individual authors such as Kingston are exonerated and sometimes the controversy seems less controversial. It takes two forms: either feminism is presented in a very limited light, as in the case of David Li, or the issue of gender is downplayed, as in the presentation of Jinqi Lin and Xiaohuang Yin. Feminist critics also confuse nationalism with the nation, falling right into the dilemma between feminism and nationalism, and the best, and in fact the only, answer is to choose both, as argued by King-kok Cheung.

Feminism does not contradict the imagined community of nation, which is in the

constant process of formation and production. However, feminism is often in conflict with narrowly-defined nationalism that demands homogeneity based on repression and erasure. Feminist critics have to think independently, outside the nationalist discourses, in order to maintain feminist critical energy. The Kingston debate is a debate about the female body on the one hand and about feminist theory on the other. While the Eurocentric masculinist desire either confines the Chinese American female body in the domestic space or manipulates it against Chinese America, it also essentializes feminism negatively. A new feminist reading of the Chinese American female body is needed, not only to free it from Eurocentric masculinist gaze but also to free feminist theory from reductive fixation.

The Woman Warrior: Narrating the Female Body in *The Woman Warrior*

The Woman Warrior is a Chinese American girl's lifetime search, through talk-stories of her mother's and her own, for the heroine in herself. The talk-stories, from the misplaced Moon Orchid to the triumphant Brave Orchid, from the tragic No Name Woman to the legendary Fa Mu Lan, are disguised tales of Maxine, the Chinese American heroine, who metamorphoses from an ordinary "no name" girl who suffers in silence to a warrior who avenges her family and Chinese America with her sword of words.

Maxine's metamorphosis from a nameless girl to a worthy heroine coincides with the metamorphosis of her cultural tradition from a watchful village that punishes individuality of the female body to a home that respects it, promoting the birth of a heroine, encouraging her to fight and always welcoming her back. The bodily betrayal by

the No Name Woman of her village tradition is not to turn Maxine's back on her family, but to come back triumphantly as Fa Mu Lan—a strong and loyal daughter—to make a new village. In the same token, Maxine's desire to leave her "home" village comes out of her efforts to be a loyal daughter. That is, she leaves her "home" in order to be welcomed back as a heroine who avenges her village, protects Chinese America and claims America. On the other hand, Maxine Hong Kingston, in writing *The Woman Warrior*, transforms her namelessness into the famous "Fa Mu Lan," an avenger-author to make a new American and Chinese American literary tradition, a heroine to be paid tribute to, a dream to have come true.

The birth of a heroine begins with the dream of individuality, an individual body breaking away from sameness and namelessness. The story of No Name Woman is a tale of a thwarted dream of a heroine-to-be, a dream of bodily adventure and an attempt of self-fulfillment. Although "[t]he work of the preservation demands that the feelings playing about in one's guts not be turned into action," the No Name woman does not "[j]ust watch their passing like cherry blossoms." Instead, Maxine imagines that "perhaps my aunt, my forerunner, caught in a slow life, let dreams grow and fade and after some months or years went toward what persisted."⁷¹ It is as Maxine's "forerunner" that No Name Woman is re-narrated in Maxine's imagination, and it is as the "forerunner aunt" that No Name Woman "branch[es]" her life into Maxine's and provides Maxine with "ancestral help."⁷²

It is her body that awakens No Name Woman to a sense of her own self and it is in body language that No Name Woman expresses her individuality. Her quest for the

heroine self may very well starts with her physical attraction toward a man's body, which leads to an awareness of her own body, her own desire and her own independent self. In other words, she is awakened to the realization that she does not belong, or does not want to belong, to anybody but to herself. Wifely obligation to an absent husband as well as to his family dissolves in her romantic gaze, in which she is set free and falls in love. She is no longer a faceless tool to maintain the family or village tradition, but she has become a heroine in her own story.

A true romantic who acts upon her desire, *No Name Woman* as Maxine's forerunner betrays the family tradition of namelessness. "She looked at a man because she liked the way the hair was tucked behind his ears, or she liked the question-mark line of a long torso curving at the shoulder and straight at the hip. For warm eyes or a soft voice or a slow walk—that's all—a few hairs, a line, a brightness, a sound, a pace, she gave up family."⁷³ Paying attention to the body of another man only makes her more conscious of her own beauty. In fact, she deliberately attracts attention to her own sexuality. As Maxine tells us, "To sustain her being in love, she often worked at herself in the mirror, guessing at the colors and shapes that would interest him, changing them frequently in order to hit on the right combination. She wanted him to look back." Despite a great deal of pain, she pulls clean her facial hair, digs out freckles, and most of all, she "[a]t the mirror" "combed individuality into her bob. A bun could have been contrived to escape into black streamers blowing in the wind or in quiet wisps about her face."⁷⁴

The defining moment of the individual heroine comes with the metamorphosis of her body, namely, her pregnancy. If *No Name Woman's* previous secret passion has

escaped the watchful eyes of the villagers, her pregnancy in the form of “a protruding melon of a stomach” is the ultimate undeniable sign of her individuality as well as betrayal. Although Maxine’s mother never notices No Name Woman’s body and does not right away connect her stomach to pregnancy, the body of No Name Woman develops on its own “until she began to look like other pregnant women, her shirt pulling and the white tops of her black pants showing.”⁷⁵

While the pregnancy of No Name Woman shows unequivocally that her body belongs to nobody but herself, the villagers’ raid of No Name Woman’s house right before the birth of her baby is to take back the control of her body. On the one hand, “[t]he villagers punished her for acting as if she could have a private life, secret and apart from them.” On the other, they want to close up the break, which her sexual and pregnant body has made, in village tradition of “roundness.” As Maxine rightly observes, “one human being flaring up into violence could open up a black hole, a maelstrom that pulled in the sky.”⁷⁶ Punishing No Name Woman is to strip her of individuality, to reinforce the village tradition void of body or self.

The tragedy of No Name Woman lies in her homelessness, the lack of shelter for a burgeoning individuality. “Unprotected against space,” No Name Woman feels nothing but pain in her body. The birth of her new baby is at the same time the painful emergence of No Name Woman as a heroine, both small yet full of humanity. It makes sense to read her handling of her baby as if she was handling her newly born self:

She pulled it up on t her belly, and it lay curled there, butt in the air, feet precisely tucked on under the other. She opened her loose shirt and buttoned the child inside. After resting, it squirmed and thrashed and she pushed it up to her breast. It turned its head this way and that until it found her nipple. There, t made little snuffling noises. She clenched her teeth at its preciousness, lovely as a young calf, a piglet, a little dog.⁷⁷

If the baby survives because of motherly protection and nursing, the death of the newly born heroine is precisely a result of the absence of her own nurturing spiritual mother. Fragile like her baby, she is not able to build a home village that respects her body and sexuality. She is even too weak to change her village, in which the female body is always perceived negatively, dangerous and threatening. It is thus no surprise that a girl's coming-of-age, embodied by menstruation, is not to be celebrated but to be warned of. As Maxine's mother warns Maxine, "Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to her [No Name Woman] could happen to you. Don't humiliate us. You wouldn't like to be forgotten as if you had never been born. The villagers are watchful."⁷⁸ The villagers have expected No Name Woman "alone to keep the traditional ways, which her brothers, now among the barbarians, could fumble without detection. The heavy, deep-rooted women were to maintain the past against the flood, safe for returning." They are also expecting Maxine to sacrifice her body and her individuality in the tradition of roundness, whose only language about sex is silence.

No Name Woman indeed does come to Maxine's rescue and provide "ancestral help." Her tragic ending ironically confirms her strength. The fact that her family have conspired to forget her makes Maxine believe that "sex was unspeakable and words so strong and fathers so frail that 'aunt' would do my father mysterious harm."⁷⁹ Her forerunner is strong enough to survive deliberate erasure of her from family history, and she does have "crossed boundaries not delineated in space."⁸⁰ Known as No Name Woman, her individuality is to be inherited by Maxine, who will not only avenge her but also change the village tradition.

If No Name Woman leaves Maxine a legacy of female individuality, the legendary Fa Mu Lan inspires her with strength of body and mind. It is no accident that the tale of Fa Mu Lan is told in the voice of “I” as if it were Maxine’s story, although the story of No Name Woman is narrated in third voice. While No Name Woman is Maxine’s forerunner, Fa Mu Lan in a sense *is* Maxine. As Maxine says, “The Swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar.”⁸¹

The difference between Fa Mu Lan and No Name Woman lies in the fact that Fa Mu Lan has a home that respects and nurtures her body and individuality. On the other hand, this warm home of hers has much to do with the strength of her individuality. In fact it can be said that it is the strength of her body that transforms her village into a home that welcomes heroines.

It is rather critical that young Fa Mu Lan leaves her family and follows the bird into the mountains to be trained as a swordswoman, a heroine. She leaves in order to return triumphantly, unlike No Name Woman who is never able to leave the repressive village for her individuality to grow. Significantly, the guiding bird “looks like the ideograph for ‘human,’ two black wings,”⁸² quite a contrast to the “Chinese word for the female *I*—which is ‘slave.’”⁸³ It shows that Fa Mu Lan’s journey from her village to the mountains is a development from the female *I* to the human *I*, from the status of a chained slave to an individual with wings of freedom.

In the mountains Fa Mu Lan learns to respect her body and sexuality. When she starts to menstruate, she is not initiate into a sense of shame as in the case of Maxine, who is told the story of No Name Woman as a warning of female sexuality. Fa Mu Lan’s coming-of-age is full of calm confidence:

Menstrual days did not interrupt my training; I was as strong as on any other day. “You’re now an adult,” explained the old woman on the first one, which happened half way through my stay on the mountain. “You can have children.” I had thought I had cut myself when jumping over my swords, one made of steel and the other carved out of a single block of jade. “However,” she added, “we are asking you to put off children for a few more years.”

“Then can I use the control you taught me and stop this bleeding?”

“No. You don’t stop shitting and pissing,” she said. “It’s the same with the blood. Let it run.”⁸⁴

Femininity of the body and female sexuality are viewed as natural as life itself.

The female blood does not contradict with strength but is part of it. It is sacred, as Fa Mu

Lan notes at the time when her parents are to carve words on her backs before her fight.

In their family hall, she “forebodingly” “caught a smell—metallic, the iron smell of

blood, as when a woman gives birth, as at the sacrifice of a large animal, as when I

menstruated and dreamed red dreams.” Associated with a mission of justice, the blood on

Fa Mu Lan’s back is transformed into “words in red and black files, like an army, like

my army.”⁸⁵ The female body is so closely knitted into strength that it comes as no

surprise when Fa Mu Lan, a general already, consummates her marriage during her long

period of battles against enemy forces. Like No Name Woman, she is pregnant. Unlike

No Name Woman who suffers with an absence of her lover, Fa Mu Lan fights with her

husband “partner” and they “rode side by side into battle.”⁸⁶ She not only has a

protruding stomach but also words of strength on her back. Both give birth under the

stars, but No Name woman is “one of the stars, a bright dot in blackness, without home,

without companion, in eternal cold and silence.”⁸⁷ On the other hand, Fa Mu Lan is not

alone. She sees her baby “falling from the sky, each night closer to the earth, his soul a

star. Just before labor began, the last star rays sank into my belly. My husband would talk

to me and not go, though I said for him to return to the battlefield.”⁸⁸ While No Name

Woman sacrifices herself protecting her lover, Fa Mu Lan is able to continue her quest as a heroine with the help and companionship of her husband.

Fa Mu Lan's training in the mountains is not just a personal journey. It is also an ambition for the whole village. She gains strength and wisdom to be a worthy warrior woman, and her worthiness lies in the ability to protect her village. As a result, she is not allowed to return home to "save just two boys," her husband and her brother taken away by soldiers. Her cause is to save "whole families" as "a champion" of her people. She will not leave the mountains, her teacher nurturers, until she is strong enough in body and mind to change the whole village. She is ready to leave "[w]hen I could point at the sky and make a sword appear, a silver bolt in the sunlight, and control its slashing with my mind."⁸⁹ In other words, she leaves for home only after she becomes a heroine whose mind works like a sword, killing the enemies instead of being killed like No Name Woman. Incidentally, it is her strong mind that saves her during her encounter with the genie leader:

My fear shot forth—a quick, jabbing sword that slashed fiercely, silver flashers, quick cuts wherever my attention drove it. The leader stared at the palpable sword swishing unclutched at his men, then laughed aloud. As if signaled by his laughter, two more swords appeared in midair. They clanged against mine, and I felt metal vibrate inside my brain. I willed my sword to hit back and to go after the head that controlled the other swords.

It is significant that her two nurturing teachers have not only trained Fa Mu Lan to be a heroine but have also guided her home. The newly born heroine are never lost, and "for some miles, whenever I turned to look for them, there would be the two old people waving. I saw them through the mist; I saw them on the clouds; I saw them big on the mountaintop when distance had shrunk the pines." It is also important that they give her extra protection, "beads, which I was to use if I got into terrible danger" and "men's

clothes and armor” to fight in battles.⁹⁰ Fa Mu Lan, a heroine, will fight better than a hero.

Strengthening her individuality away from her family does not mean that Fa Mu Lan cuts off her family ties, however. In fact she keeps between them a magic tie, a gourd through which she still sees her parents, her husband, her brother and other family members, and knows their need of freedom away from oppressive realities. Her desire to connect with her family, together with her incredible strength of individuality, enables Fa Mu Lan, a heroine already, to come home, welcomed as a heroine. Interestingly, Fa Mu Lan finds her parents “as old as the two whose shapes I could at last no longer see.”⁹¹ Her two nurturing teachers seem to disappear into her parents, who, after carving words on her back, “nursed me just as if I had fallen in battle after many victories. Soon I was strong again.”⁹²

Fa Mu Lan avenges her family and fellow villagers in the end after she kills the enemies. She also avenges herself by freeing many women slaves who “would not be good for anything” because of “their little bound feet.” Unclaimed or disclaimed by their families, these women “wandered away like ghosts” and are said to have “turned into the band of swordswomen who were a mercenary army,” the “witch amazons” of runaway slave girls and daughters-in-law.⁹³

The stories of Moon Orchid and Brave Orchid parallel those of No Name Woman and Fa Mu Lan. Moon Orchid, Maxine’s aunt, never has a chance to develop her sense of self, just like No Name Woman, Maxine’s other aunt. She lives alone in her village on the money her husband sends her from America, and her desire to claim her husband and

join his life in America is less of her own initiative than a result of Brave Orchid's insistence. However, it is nobody else but she herself who steps on an airplane and flies to America. In a sense, Moon Orchid has the bud of individuality, tiny and weak it might be, like her voice. Nonetheless, America is not at all a nurturing home, and in fact she has no home in America: her husband, remarried with a new wife and new life, keeps her out of his house, and so she has to live with her daughter. Homeless, she whispers with fear, her feeble individuality smothered and her life eventually slipping away.

Brave Orchid, Maxine's mother, is as brave as her name precisely for the reason that she has a space to herself to develop her individual strength. Living in the absence of her husband who labors in America, she leaves her village for a medical school, in which she not only learns skills of independence but also acquires a strong mind against all kinds of ghosts intending to harm. On her way to the medical school she also comes across a bird, "a sea bird painted on the ship to protect it against shipwreck and winds." If Fa Mu Lan's human-shaped bird leads her to her ultimate goal, this sea bird makes sure that Brave Orchid arrives her school instead of being kidnapped by river pirates.

The medical school offers Brave Orchid, as well as other female students, a room of their own and a home of women with similar spirits and dreams. While Brave Orchid fights off the ghost in the haunted dormroom, her women friends chant to bring her home:

Come home, come home, Brave Orchid, who has fought the ghosts and won.
Return to To Keung School, Kwangtung City, Kwangtung Province. Your
classmates are here waiting for you, scholarly Brave Orchid. Come home.
Come home. Come back and help us with our lessons. School is starting soon.
Come for breakfast. Return, daughter of New Society Village, Kwangtung
Province. Your brother and sisters call you. Your friends call you. We need
you. Return to us. Return to us at the To Keung School. There's work to do.

Come back, Doctor Brave Orchid, be unafraid. Be unafraid. You are safe now in the To Keung School. All is safe. Return.⁹⁴

Brave Orchid excels at schoolwork, and her battle with ghosts makes her a model for other heroines to follow. She has touched other women students' lives with her scholarly work and bold mind, and she is to return her village to make a difference there. The medical school is a home that trains her individuality while her village is a place to exercise it. Like Fa Mu Lan who leaves her village in order to return as a heroine, Brave Orchid "had gone away ordinary and come back miraculous, like the ancient magicians who came down from the mountains." Unlike Fa Mu Lan who dresses in men's clothes, Brave Orchid is well-dressed with "good shoes" and "long gown" that have amazed the villagers.⁹⁵

The "I" in the heroine is so strong that it has sustained Brave Orchid through many years of hard work and social prejudice in America. It enables her to make a home village in America. Different from the distant third-person narrative about Moon Orchid, the tale of Brave Orchid is filled with I's. It is told alternately in her own voice or in the voice of Maxine who constantly reminds her readers with the phrase "my mother." Claiming the strength of the female "I," it only makes sense that Maxine's own story is narrated in the form of autobiography, the literary genre that accentuates "I." It is in this sense that Brave Orchid's life "branch[es] into" Maxine's and offers her more "ancestral help."⁹⁶

Maxine has to follow the steps of Fa Mu Lan and Brave Orchid, leaving her home village to strengthen her individuality in order to be a heroine who transforms and protects her families. She gets straight A's, and she goes to Berkeley on a scholarship.

Although she leaves home, her departure is not complete since her mother would not let her go completely. In other words, her departure does not guarantee her return to the home village, or if she does return, she would be too weak to make a difference. As she tells her mother, “I’ve found some places in this country that are ghost-free. And I think I belong there, where I don’t catch colds or use my hospitalization insurance. Here I’m sick so often, I can barely work.”⁹⁷ Similarly, she cannot do anything helpful when her parents’ laundry shop is torn down. Her protest of racism is done “in my bad, small-person’s voice that makes no impact,” and she is fired from work when she refuses to participate in racist acts. She needs to fight against “stupid racists” as well as “tyrants who for whatever reason can deny my family food and work.”⁹⁸ Yet her sword is not ready, and she is only a heroine-to-be. It is only when her mother loves her enough and trusts her strength enough to let her go that Maxine becomes a full-fledged heroine ready to fly:

“It’s better, then, for you to stay away. The weather in California must not agree with you. You can come for visits.” She got up and turned off the light. “Of course, you must go, Little Dog.”

A weight lifted from me. The quilts must be filling with air. The world is somehow lighter. She has not called me that endearment for years—a name to fool the gods. I am really a Dragon, as she is a Dragon, both of us born in the dragon years. I am practically a first daughter of a first daughter.

“Good night, Little Dog.”

“Good night, Mother.”

She sends me on my way, working always and now old, dreaming the dreams about shrinking babies and the sky covered with airplanes and a Chinatown bigger than the ones here.

Letting her go in the end is to respect Maxine’s individual self, to grant her freedom to grow, and to provide her with mobility to travel across boundaries between America and Chinese America. Letting her go is to let her be American, to fight for her

dreams, to honor and protect her family and village, to avenge Chinese America, and to change America. Letting her go is to welcome her home.

Maxine's sword is her words. As she puts it, "[w]hat we [Fa Mu Lan and I] have in common are the words at our backs. The idioms for *revenge* are 'report a crime' and 'report to five families.' The reporting is the vengeance--not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words. And I have so many words—"Chink" words and "gook" words to—that they do not fit on my skin."⁹⁹ To avenge her families and herself, she need not reclaim the two laundries in America or travel to China to take back their land; instead, she must break the imposed silence and write back: write the Chinese American experiences back into American history, and write humanity back to the female I.

Maxine's talk-stories present the specific racial experiences of Chinese Americans in the United States, namely the invisibility of Chinese American experiences in white America due to a long history racist exclusionist acts. As Maxine states, "[t]hose of us in the first American generations have had to figure out how the invisible world the emigrants built around our childhoods fits in solid America."¹⁰⁰ Silence, the long cherished Chinese wisdom, is now imposed upon Chinese immigrants, who seem to be forever homeless despite their desperate longing for a home in the new land. Faced with the threat of deportation, they have to cover their real names and hide who they are, while trying to build a home out of unfriendliness. Caught in between a desire for home and an unease of homelessness, Chinese Americans are silenced. Maxine's mother thus tells the young Maxine not to tell; instead

Lie to Americans. Tell them you were born during the San Francisco earthquake. Tell them your birth certificate and your parents were burned up in

the fire. Don't report crimes; tell them we have no crimes and no poverty. Give a new name every time you get arrested; the ghosts won't recognize you. Pay the new immigrants twenty-five cents an hour and say we have no unemployment. And of course, tell them we're against Communism. Ghosts have no memory anyway and poor eyesight. And the Han people won't be pinned down.¹⁰¹

The strategies employed by Maxine's mother and other Chinese Americans may avoid deportation, but they also continue to keep the people invisible and unfree in the land of the free. It takes a warrior woman, Maxine, to break this silence by telling or talking, the opposite of her village strategies. It seems that Maxine betrays the village tradition—not to tell—with her talk-stories, but she is in fact inspired by her mother's talk-stories. Telling or talking in this sense means revenge, for it not only tells about Chinese America but it also tells on racist America. It avenges Chinese America by changing perspectives in America.

Maxine's telling also breaks the silence imposed on women by the sexist discourse both within and outside Chinese American communities. It ruthlessly exposes misogyny in Chinese and Chinese American culture such as child bride and concubinage that had enslaved women. It attacks fathers and grandfathers who prefer boys to girls, who are compared to "maggots," and it also criticizes husbands who are stupid, arrogant and who do not respect their wives. On the other hand, Maxine tells that to be American-feminine does not give her freedom either. For, to be American-feminine is not about freedom of a human being, but it is about talking softly so as to get boys and dates. It is to chain the individuality of a girl or woman to certain male attitudes.

Maxine writes the heroine back into the Chinese American experiences. While her mother talks in private about the legendary Fa Mu Lan, Maxine tells to the public about this strong and strong-willed warrior woman, who respects her self while fighting for her

village. She is individualistic, but never fights alone. She is a heroine with a loving family who always welcomes her home and a loving husband who fights side by side with her. In fact, it is their recognition and respect of each other's individuality that ties them together as a couple:

... "You are beautiful," he said, and meant it truly. "I have looked for you everywhere. I've been looking for you since the day that bird flew away with you." We were so pleased with each other, the childhood friend found at last...

"I've looked for you too," I said, the tent now snug around us like a secret house when we were kids. "Whenever I heard about a good fighter, I went to see if it were you," I said. "I saw you marry me. I'm so glad you married me."¹⁰²

Instead of the old master-slave relationship, Fa Mu Lan and her husband are partners, friends, and families. It would be the husband of Fa Mu Lan, if any husband, who could say, 'I could have been a drummer, but I had to think about the wife and kids. You know how it is.'¹⁰³ Fa Mu Lan is a heroine with a home, a heroine Maxine wants to be. Only when the heroine is recovered and uncovered in words can Maxine reclaim her long lost heritage of heroinism, not just for herself but also for the whole community, in which both women and men are "necessary."¹⁰⁴

It should be noted that Maxine's narration of Fa Mu Lan is different from the "original" Chinese version, in which Fa Mu Lan becomes a warrior woman for the sole purpose of fulfilling daughterly duty to her father. She does not have any words on her back about revenge or coming home, and she is not married, let alone having a child in between battles. However, Frank Chin's accusation that it distorts Chinese history is rather simplistic. In fact, the revision of the "original" story is both the departure and return of the heroine. Its departure from the traditional version is just part of Maxine's departure from her home village, a necessary step for the aspiring heroine to develop her

sense of self in order for her to return. At the same time, Maxine's different narrative has replaced the "original" Chinese tradition that emphasizes women's self-effacing sacrifice, and made a new Chinese American tradition that respects women's bodies, welcomes women's strong mind, and inspires young Chinese American girls like Maxine. Maxine is a heroine who cannot wait to come back, wishing that "my people understand the resemblance [between Fa Mu Lan and me] soon so that I can return to them."¹⁰⁵

While Fa Mu Lan's words on her back guide her home, Maxine's talk-stories will also take her back to where she belongs. Her home is her village, the Chinatowns, and ultimately America, all of which are transformed by and in her words. The story of T'sai Yen, a Chinese poetess of the second and third century, is rather symbolic. Kidnapped by a chieftain of Southern Hsiung-nu, she is forced to marry him and has had two children, who laugh at her Chinese. The heroine wanders alone until she finds a new home in her lyrics to the tunes of the flutes played by the barbarians, who after all know more music than "death sounds:"

Then, out of Ts'ai Yen's tent, which was apart from the others, the barbarians heard a woman's voice singing, as if to her babies, a song so high and clear, it matched the flutes. Ts'ai Yen Sang about China and her family there. Her words seemed to be Chinese, but the barbarians understood their sadness and anger. Sometimes they thought they could catch barbarian phrases about forever wandering. Her children did not laugh, but eventually sang along when she left her tent to sit by the winter campfires, ringed by barbarians.¹⁰⁶

T'sai Yen, who used to live apart from the barbarians, forms a new "roundness" with them, including her two children. If the sound of death in battles causes rupture in human relations, the sound of music heals it. It is significant that this harmonious music is composed both by T'sai Yen and by the barbarians. Similarly, Maxine's home is possible only if America eliminates its own "death sounds" of racism and really listens to

Maxine's words. On the other hand, T'sai Yen's song is sung by the Chinese to their own instruments after she comes back to her Chinese home. As Maxine says, "It translated well."¹⁰⁷ In the same token, Maxine's talk-stories will also "translate" well in Chinese America, marking her own triumphant return.

Maxine as a heroine and an avenger-author is not welcomed home, however. She is not celebrated as Fa Mu Lan, but is ironically treated as No Name Woman, her forerunner in a different sense this time. Kingston and her book are condemned, just like No Name Woman and her illegitimate baby. Similarly, Kingston is considered dangerous for hurting the "roundness" of Chinese American community while No Name Woman creates a rupture in the "roundness" of her village. As a result, Kingston is punished for her private thought, her individual artistic freedom, and her border crossings.

Kingston is a heroine who creates a different kind of "roundness" in both Chinese America and America in general, and has intended *The Woman Warrior* to have universal appeal. As she puts it, "I do believe in the timelessness and universality of individual vision. It [*The Woman Warrior*] would not just be a family book or an American book or a woman's book but a world book, and at the same moment, my book."¹⁰⁸ Presenting herself as an "American" writer and describing her works as "American" texts, Kingston de-stabilizes the least questioned equation of Americanness with whiteness. By declaring her nonwhite and nonmale identities as American, she transforms the traditional fixed, racist and sexist definition of America, suggesting that the fluidity of America and American literary canon, both of which need to continue to be redefined.

Conclusion:

The Kingston debate is discursively produced. Reading is political, and it is important to read Asian American literary texts politically. While it is extremely important to include the specific Chinese American history into readings of Chinese American texts, we do not need to panic even if the readers are not informed about Chinese American history. According to Reed Dasenbrock, “misunderstanding or unintelligibility” is not necessarily “a danger to be avoided at all costs.” On the contrary, “the meaningfulness of multicultural works is in large measure a function of their unintelligibility for part of their audience.”¹⁰⁹ In other words, some “misunderstandings” may very well open up the space of the work and lead to fresh exciting interpretations unavailable to those readers who understand all.

Kingston is frustrated about cultural misreadings about her book and about the burden of “representational inevitability.” She believes that the pressure would be relieved if more and more Chinese American texts become available to mainstream American readers. On the other hand, a diversity of Chinese American texts can be accessible to mainstream American readers only if we change our ways of reading. The Kingston debate possibly opens a door of opportunity for many other Chinese and Asian American writers, and contributes to the mature development of theories, particularly feminist theories.

Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* has produced certain aspects of Chinese America and America. She does not need to feel guilty or trapped after all. Nor should Asian American feminists.

Chapter 2 Wei Hui: Creating A New Image of the Female Author among Beauty Writers and Hot Criticisms

Wei Hui has become a phenomenon, a literary concept and a cultural sign in contemporary China at the turn of the millennium. Since the publication of her first and semi-autobiographical novel *Shanghai Baby* in October 1999, *Shanghai Baby*, the book and the author, has been at the center of hot debates in and beyond the field of literature. *Shanghai Baby*, fashionably packaged with the author's picture on the front cover, was an instant and phenomenal best seller, with copyright in 18 countries. It is not an overstatement that the year 2000, as far as culture is concerned, was the year of Wei Hui. The whole nation was scrutinizing and talking about her, ranging from various mainstream nationwide-circulating newspapers like *China Youth Daily*, *People's Daily*, *Guangming Daily*, and *Liberation Daily*, to some local media like *Beijing Youth Daily*, *Qilu Evening*, and from influential journals like *Literary Review*, *Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art*, and *Social Science* to journals on university campuses, even online journals. While some critics argue that she is the spokesperson of the New-New-Generation (xinxin renlie) or Y-generation born in the 1970s and represents a fresh start of the new generation of Chinese literature, most people attack her for being fake, treacherous, and trashy. Instead of representing liberating alternative feminist youth urban subculture, they assert that Wei Hui caters to the mainstream commercial culture, satisfies the male gaze and voyeuristic desire, and more importantly, shamelessly corrupts literature and literary readers, especially young literary readers, with her excessive attention to sexuality and her surrender to Western Phallus.

In April 2000, Wei Hui participated in a book tour to promote *Shanghai Baby* in Chengdu, Sichuan, and her “different,” provocative, and Shanghai-baby-like dressing code, behavior and talk again shocked the public and caused media sensation. In the same month, *Shanghai Baby* was banned in China for having too many sexual thus pornographic descriptions, which were, according to the authorities, “harmful” for the minds of the growing youth. Except a few commentaries that defend Wei Hui far and between, the book ban legitimized the already negative silence in literary and cultural criticism about Wei Hui. Finally and officially, Wei Hui as an author was not worthy of “serious” critical attention any more. The future of Chinese literature was saved.

In this chapter, I argue that the Wei Hui Phenomenon is culturally produced and politically constructed, participated by the author herself to a degree, by the mass media, and particularly by literary and cultural critics, whose overwhelming negativity contributes directly to the ban of Wei Hui’s book. It is essentially a historically contingent battle for the power to define a new-generation female author within the sweeping globalized yet fundamentally nationalist contemporary Chinese culture. Between a voyeuristic yet moralistic media that profit from sensationalized/sexualized femininity and a nationalist and puritanical literary/cultural criticism that devalues femininity and abhors sexuality, Wei Hui attempts to break open a space embracing rebellious exploration of art and sexuality of urban youth, especially of young urban women. In her deliberate distancing from the nationalist revolutionary literary tradition, Wei Hui flirts with the flourishing globalized media culture rather too closely. She takes advantage of the mass media, yet is also burned. She connects authorship with stardom,

yet is herself transformed into the entertainment to be consumed by various readers and audiences.

The Wei Hui controversy is symptomatic of the inadequacies of contemporary Chinese literary and culture criticisms. On the one hand, the Wei Hui phenomenon is as much about the commercialization of the author and her writing as about the popularization of the critic and the criticism under the pressure of a rising popular culture. On the other hand, it reflects a revived narrowly defined, dichotomous, nationalist China-vs.-the-West literary approach, ironically buttressed by the recently imported and extremely popular Western post-colonial theory.

More specifically, the lack of feminist critiques on sexuality, in comparison to the overwhelming negativity and attack on the same issue concerning the book and the author, demonstrates a theoretical dead end of state-sanctioned nationalistic feminism, which, in its struggle for survival, gives up, or is forced to give up, its critical feminist force, reinforcing its submission to patriarchal nationalist construct of China.

This analysis of the Wei Hui controversy is my intervention as a feminist critic into the cultural production of the new female author, in the hope to redefine feminism in the context of contemporary China and capitalist globalization. While it is legitimate to recognize unequal political, cultural and economic power relations between China and the West, it is critical that Chinese literary and cultural criticism, feminist criticism in particular, should always maintain its critical edge, to distance from and challenge masculinist nationalistic discourses that repress women and women's sexualities in the name of nation.

In Search of the New Female Author: Another Production of *Shanghai Baby*

Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baby* tells a story of Ni Ke, or Coco by her nickname, an attractive, ambitious and adventurous young woman who constantly and consciously constructs herself as a new free-spirited female author, in opposition to the dull and serious image of the officially recognized and state-sponsored didactic intellectual working and living under the shadow of an authoritative government. Graduating from the renowned Fudan University in the famous international metropolitan of Shanghai, Coco quits her stable, highly respected yet boring position as a journalist for a much less respected job as a waitress at a café where she collects exciting life experiences and meets interesting people, including her boyfriend Tiantian, a handsome and kind young man whose innocence and love for her is the inspiration for Coco. She writes during the day and dreams of becoming a best-seller writer who puts into her works all kinds of exciting yet taboo themes such as sex, violence, drug, alcoholism and murder.

Coco is in love with Tiantian, who does not have a job but he regularly receives money from his mother living in Spain. Tiantian loves Coco; in fact, his whole life depends on their romantic relationship—love is the only thing that he thinks is worth living for. However, their love is not nearly complete: it is more spiritual than physical since Tiantian is impotent. Coco, sexually unfulfilled and adventurous, gets to know Mark, a tall handsome married German businessman who works at the Shanghai division of a German company. This newly developed relationship satisfies Coco sexual desires and Mark's curiosity about exotic Oriental women, and is nothing more than purely sexual, at least to Mark. Although Coco admits, without shame, that her life is perfect with these two men: one is in love with her spirit and the other gives her orgasm, she

constantly struggles between the split desires of her soul and flesh and cannot find home in either man. The novel ends with Tiantian's death of drug overdose, Mark leaving for home (Germany and wife) while Coco continues her quest of herself, asking the question "Who am I?"¹

Wei Hui's determined construct of a new sexy and sexual bad-girl author, embodied by Ni Ke/Coco in the novel and later by Wei Hui herself, is a response to cultural conflicts in Contemporary China between the status of male-centered literary tradition, the shaky position of feminism, and the rising power of popular culture. While the ending question "Who am I" obviously suggests no ending to the clashes, the official ban on *Shanghai Baby* definitely shows the crisis and danger of this tension between nationalism, feminism and commercialism. Wei Hui rebels, with her bold and sensational presentation of female sexuality, against an almost century-old definition of intellectual as the engineer of national soul. She draws upon feminist politics as well as the power of commercialism. However, the compromise between the two joined forces is uneasy and contradictory. Wei Hui/Coco lacks critical awareness of the unequal power relations between different nationalist masculinities thrown together by the global culture, and her ambivalence toward both feminism and urban popular culture takes away some subversive power from the female body. Thus, Wei Hui/Coco's subversion of patriarchal nationalist literary tradition is rather incomplete.

Wei Hui's intention to create a new female author is prompted throughout the novel. Ni Ke tells the reader that her late great-grandmother, who "had second sight," is the first person to predict her future success as "a writer. With a literary star shining

down on me and a belly full of ink, I would, she said, make my mark one day.”² This prediction is reinforced by Tian Tian, who reminds readers of Ni Ke’s characteristics typical to a writer. According to Tian Tian, “Your eyes are deep and your voice carries real emotion. You never stop watching your customers. And I’ve even heard you discussing existentialism and voodoo with Spider.” Just like Coco’s grandmother, Tian Tian is confident with his discovery, saying, “From the moment I first saw you at the Green Stalk, I just felt you were cut out to be a writer.”³

Coco’s talent is also confirmed on many occasions. While she admits her ambitious dream to be a writer at Fudan University, her college life also provides her with numerous opportunities to prove herself in successful love letters that almost always win over what she wants. While working as a journalist, “the interviews and stories I wrote were like something out of a novel, with their twisted plots and rarefied language, so that the real seemed false, and vice versa.”⁴ In fact, writing is not a dream out of reach to Coco. She has actually published a collection of short stories, which, according to Tian Tian, ‘is cool’ and “[s]he is so observant.” He does not forget to add that “she’s going to be very successful.”⁵ As far as Coco herself is concerned, she seems to be somewhat satisfied with the achievement of her first publication. Although she does not profit from the book, it brings her some fame and “attention. (Male readers sent me letters enclosing erotic pictures).”⁶ By the time she meets Madonna, the only friend of Tian Tian’s, it is already established that Coco is a writer. Later, Coco even draws upon science to prove her talent. Seeing her therapist to deal with and to forget her failed relationship with a short man during her college years, she, along with the readers, is told by the therapist, in an unequivocal voice, about her personalities typical of a writer—“weakness,

dependence, contradiction, naivety, masochism, narcissism, Oedipal Complex, and so forth”—and about her bright future. He concludes that “you’ll be a good writer. A writer buries the past with her words.”⁷

Coco is not contented with the writer she is, however. Her ambition does not allow her to be like just any other writer, but she wishes to be different, extraordinarily and revolutionarily different from others, particularly writers before her. On the one hand, she impatiently attempts to get away from the boring tradition of contemporary Chinese writing. On the other hand, she seems to have foreseen trouble because of her disobedience, thus asking for a space of literary freedom. As she informs her father, “The way we think is just too different. We’re separated by a hundred generation gaps. We’d best respect each other rather than argue our cases.”⁸

Coco’s determination to break from Chinese literary tradition is evident in Tian Tian’s ambitious, although somewhat arrogant, comments on the status of contemporary Chinese literature, which in his opinion has not presented books worthy of reading but “empty stories” in his eye. Thus it is the mission of Coco to “write a novel that would take the literary world by storm.”⁹ Incidentally, Tian Tian’s vision of shock is similar to what Coco has in her mind about her remarkable writing that will make her well known and “burst upon the city like fireworks.”¹⁰

Significantly, the construct of a new female author is intimately related to the image of bad girls. Quoting the saying “the good girls go to heaven, but the bad girls go everywhere,” Coco explicitly tells the reader of her decision between the two choices. Instead of living a dull predictable life as a good girl, Coco resigns from her promising

journalist career, in complete clash with her parents. Seeing that they couldn't persuade Coco to see the importance of stability in life, her parents finally give up:

“I don't know what to do about you. We'll just have to wait and see how you'll turn out. I might as well pretend I didn't raise you,” said Mother, almost shouting. She looked as if she had been struck hard in the face.

“You've hurt your mother's feelings,” said Daddy, “And I'm disappointed, too. A girl like you is bound to be taken advantage of...”¹¹

Instead of changing her mind to comfort her parents like a dutiful daughter, Coco sticks to her original plan to move in with Tian Tian. While this action of independence is common and expected in the West, it is regarded as a most rebellious move against the pull of (patriarchal) family ties in China, where parents, like the State, continue to assert their authorities upon their (adult) children, although to a lesser degree today.

Coco as a new female author does not intend to have a complete break from Chinese literary tradition, however, just as she does not wish to cut all the ties to her parents. However shocking her difference may be, she still needs their acknowledgement of and pride in her. At her parents' despair of her leaving the stable job and comfortable home, Coco says, “Believe me, I know what I'm doing.”¹² Besides being confident in her decision, she seems to be asking for their patience so that she can prove herself. When she is extremely depressed at the insurmountable distance between her and the two men she loves—Tian Tian takes to drug while Mark leaves for Germany, all she thinks of is to go home although she admits that her parents would never understand her:

They couldn't know what their daughter had been up to. They would never really understand the impulsive, noisy world and its futility from their daughter's point of view. They didn't know their daughter's boyfriend took drugs, that their daughter's lover would soon be on a plane home to Germany. Or that the novel she was writing was so chaotic, revealing, full of metaphysical thoughts and raw sex.

They would never know the terror deep in their daughter's heart, and the desire that death can't overcome. Her life would always be a revolver of desire, capable of going off and killing at any moment.¹³

She cannot wait for the elevator but decides to climb up the stairs to the 20th floor, despite her exhaustion. As she says, "but I didn't want to rest. I just wanted to get home."¹⁴ If this is only one break she takes from her adventures in life, her final decision to move back in with her parents is rather significant. With Tian Tian's death, Mark's leaving, and good girl (the lady-like Zhu Sha, her cousin) marrying bad boy (young artist and ex-boyfriend of Madonna), Coco seems to be tired of her life experiments. She blames Madonna for Tian Tian's addiction to drug, and condemns Connie for being a bad mother to him. Informing the readers of what is happening to all the characters, Coco sounds rather distant from the crazy life of which she is once a part. She makes clear that she "didn't want to be too close to [Madonna] anymore" and that she "plan[s] to move back in with [her] parents."¹⁵ After a while of submerging in the turmoil of youth urban life, Coco returns "home," a little more mature, a little more peaceful and a little more conservative.

Of course, Coco's parents accept her with open arms, which she expects. Possibly Coco/Wei Hui also expects that Chinese literary circle, particularly the State, would forgive her rebellion and welcome her return as well. Unfortunately, the State not only refuses to understand her but also refuses to acknowledge her. Her story is ordered to be destroyed, and she, as an author, is bad and thus should be banned.

Coco's bad girl image of the new author is closely connected to the ever popular globalized commercial culture, which has swept today's Chinese youth off their traditional cultural roots. Instead of looking at the flourishing popular culture critically,

Coco fully embraces it. In fact, it seems that her attitude towards the popular is the fundamental difference between her and her parents, between her writing and the literary tradition she tries to break free from. Declaring her goal to be an author, Coco announces to her parents, “Even though the profession’s totally passé, I’m going to make writing up-to-date again.”¹⁶

Coco’s project takes on two different aspects: presenting a fashionable image of herself as a writer and producing literary works with exciting formulas. Writing is no longer done in ivory tower or about stories not related to people, but it must appeal to the readers and sell. In the process of fashionizing writing, Coco turns it into a business that carefully produces, packs and presents its products. She thinks more like a practical businesswoman than a writer of words from her heart, knowing what she needs to be successful. While serious content alone is dull and beautiful packaging alone is shallow, she decides that “my ideal literary work would have profound intellectual content and a best-selling, sexy cover.”¹⁷ On the other hand, she accurately links fashion to youth, focusing on the new generation of young urban people. She tells the readers, “My instinct told me that I should write about turn-of-the-century Shanghai. This fun-loving city: the bubbles of happiness that rise from it, the new generation it has nurtured, and the vulgar, sentimental, and mysterious atmosphere to be found in its back street and alleys.”¹⁸ She hopes that her writing will be transformed into substantial and meaningful art, which could turn into a super commodity for

all those good-looking, sexually liberal avant-gardes of the young generation willing to have fun in the gardens of Shanghai and to indulge themselves in the fin-de-siècleness. It was they—the new people invisible and hidden in the corners of the city—who would applaud for or throw rotten eggs to my novel. Free-spirited and running wild, they were the ideal allies for all young novelists who attempted to create something new.¹⁹

Necessary to the successful sale of the literary commodity is a formula Coco comes up with while in college and repeats a few times in the novel. She “had wanted to become a writer of really exciting thrillers: *evil omen, conspiracy, ulcer, dagger, lust, poison, madness, and moonlight* were all words that sprang readily to my mind.”²⁰ In fact, *Shanghai Baby* follows the exact recipe, including Coco’s sense of something bad about to happen, Tian Tian’s strange family story, Coco’s inability to resist Mark, the nightclubs, Madonna’s parties, etc. The heat brought by its publication upon Chinese literary circle, its ban included, ironically proves the effectiveness of that formula.

The other side of the same coin is to construct an image of the new female novelist. Of course, the novelist whose novel is fashionable takes fashion to her heart. From the beginning of the book, Coco seems to casually mention that Tian Tian’s apartment is decorated “simply and comfortably” with furniture from IKEA, and has a Strauss piano.²¹ When Tian Tian tries to inspire Coco to write, the list of international brand-name products includes Dove chocolate, Mother’s Choice salad dressing, Sundory soda, and her inseparable Mild Seven cigarettes, not to mention Chanel since its founder Coco Chanel is her idol, which is how Coco has got her nickname. While the new-generation readers may accept with excitement the new novelist, Coco welcomes these new imported Western commodities, brought to her life by the open-door policies. In addition to the Western goods that make her write more comfortably, it is the Western thought that decorates her writing. Besides Henry Miller who is considered a spiritual father by Coco and mentioned several times in the story, each chapter of Wei Hui/Coco’s novel begins with a quote or quotes from some Western authors, musicians, philosophers or celebrities. In the context of Communist control and cultural Westernization as a result

of globalization, Western commodities are popular for the reason that they are not only new, but serve as a channel of rebellion against the suppression of an authoritative tradition, represented particularly by parents, older generations and the State.

While writers are supposed to assume the responsibility for the future of the nation, what Coco is concerned about is to avoid boredom and enjoy her life. She clearly presents a desirable writer's life, full of innocence and naivety of youth embracing Western popular culture:

Like me, my heroine did not want to lead an ordinary life. She is ambitious, has two men, and lives on an emotional roller coaster. She believes in these words: *Suck dry the juice of life like a leech, including its secret happiness and hurt, spontaneous passion and eternal longing*. Like me, she was afraid that when she went to hell there would be no films to watch, no comfortable pajamas to wear, no heavenly sounds of records to be heard—just suffocating boredom.²²

In the time of global commercialization and political censorship, fashion-rebellion is rather limited, especially since the commercial culture is taking over the whole cultural landscape and has already become mainstream. Although the popular culture resulting from globalization initially brings fresh air to the stiff State-controlled cultural space, it is unable and unwilling to oppose the State. On the contrary, it depends on the State's approval for its survival. It may test the limits of the State control from time to time, but its goal is to profit, not to rebel.

Sex and the City: the Femme Fatale, Male Control and Neocolonial Shanghai

The contradictions of the fashionable Shanghai Baby as a rebellious new author is most evident in Coco's construct of her sexuality, which proves to be politically most ambiguous and most dangerous. Wei Hui/Coco's contradictory portrayal of sexuality as

an central feature of the new female author, together with Wei Hui's personal interpretation and public presentation of that persona (which will be discussed later), is the major reason for Wei Hui and *Shanghai Baby* to have caught on fire. Unlike some popular and official explanation, however, the real "problem" is not too much sexuality but how sexuality, especially female sexuality, is constructed and regulated in the equally ambiguous post-colonial and neo-colonial metropolitan of Shanghai. Wei Hui continues the female literary tradition of femme fatale, and maps out the space of a thriving yet threatening territory—the city.

Female sexuality, in Wei Hui's imagination, is disruptive and destructive, and the sexual Coco is a femme fatale in disguise. Often she seems just a superficial naïve feminine girl, as she tells the readers that she knows her power and unashamedly accepts all compliments from other people. Throughout the book, she has been saying how pretty she looks, through her girlfriend, boyfriend, lover, cousin, other acquaintances, and herself. She believes that she is attractive to men, evident by letters and erotic pictures from male readers, and by Madonna's brutal joke about how she can make Coco the hottest call girl. Coco seems to enjoy showing off and being acknowledged of her beauty, without giving it much serious critical thought. Yet in her dark fascination with fashion glows her threatening, highly sexual body. She is definitely not just a beautiful harmless decorating "flower vase" for anybody else. On the contrary, her seeming conventionality contains danger like a sharp sword that attacks. As she says, "My love of flowers may be conventionally feminine, but I believe the day will come when I look in the mirror and compare my face to a poisonous plant."²³ However superficial she may be in her

challenge of the traditional mysterious out-of-worldly image of Chinese writers, the new female author charged with sexual energy proves to be too “poisonous” for the authorities to handle and must be controlled, if not destroyed.

Coco, the “poisonous flower,” is destined to be the danger in her relationship with Tian Tian. Her fairy tale of their falling in love with each other does not end with “happily ever after.” It actually begins with Tian Tian’s impotence on the first night Coco moves in, and thus the deconstruction of the Prince Charming, threatened by excessive female sexuality. In a sense, the seemingly over-sexed Coco mirrors the under-sexed Tian Tian, “inseparable like the North Pole and South Pole of the Earth,” or the different sides of the same coin. In Coco’s words, “I’m full of energy and ambition and see the world as a ripe fruit just waiting to be eaten. He is introspective and romantic, and for him life is a cake laced with arsenic—every bite poisons him a little more.”²⁴ This metaphor of poisoned life coincides with her self-comparison with the “poisonous flower,” implying the tragic end of Tian Tian’s death, which happens to result from overdose of drug—“poison” (du) in Chinese.

Coco’s strong sexual desires and aggressive seduction only makes Tian Tian suffer from his sense of inadequacy. When Coco strip-dances one evening on a roof of a grand hotel, “her body was as smooth as velvet, and as strong as an amazing leopard...with elegant yet wild sensuality.” However, at her invitation to “enter my body like a real lover,” he shrinks from it, saying “No, I can’t do it.”²⁵ On the other hand, her uncontrollable affair with Mark drives him away from home to drug/poison. While no specialist could cure his psychological impotence, the rehab facilities cannot keep him away from drug and eventually death.

Coco is not the only source of poisonous castration, however. Female sexuality has long been associated with danger and death of masculinity for Tian Tian. It is Connie, Tian Tian's mother, who starts it ten years before when Tian Tian's father dies in Spain while visiting Connie. It is interesting to note that his grandma accuses Connie of infidelity and murder. The theory is rather simple: Connie's uncontrollable sexuality leads her to the killing of her husband, with the help of Juan, Connie's alleged lover and present husband. Although Tian Tian does not clarify his opinion on this allegation, his coldness and indifference to Connie suggests a conviction, much deeper than what he admits to Coco. Unlike his statement that 'I don't even know now what had happened, and it was probably true,' he is firmly convinced of the association of the death of his father with irrepressible sexuality of his mother, who never comes back to China until after ten years for business opportunities. In this sense, Connie and Coco—is it another coincident that they have the same first name initial?—play a different yet similar role to Tian Tian.

Compared with the destructive aggression in Tian Tian's life, Coco's attitude toward Mark, the married German, is subversive in a subtle way. It seems that Coco is rather passive and powerless throughout this affair. She waits for Mark to seduce her, to protect her and to satisfy her. She lets him send her and Tian Tian home when Tian Tian faints in a party because of drug overdose. She never refuses a chance to meet him, and she worships his sexual power. Despite her growing emotional attachment to Mark, she obeys the rule of the game set by him and has to sometimes persuade herself that this affair means nothing but sex.

Yet Coco's disruptive power slowly but steadily emerges out of her sexual and emotional submission to this Western man. At first she only steals a few bills from his wallet, although this proves to be just a little trick since she starts to compliment how Western men do not mind missing a few bills, in comparison to the stinginess of some Chinese men. When she sees him for the last time, she slips his wedding band off his finger during his nap. Stealing the symbol of marriage is not just "a joke," as Coco explains.²⁶ It is an attempt, a continuous but failed attempt, to dismantle Mark's marital relationship. On the other hand, this action of stealing demonstrates certain emotional distance and independence from Mark. In other words, she has not lost herself completely and she is doing whatever is best for *her*, not him.

Her most subversive message spells out casually her detachment from the affair. In fact, Coco and Mark seem to have reversed roles in the end. Instead of showing excitement at Mark's email, Coco simply informs the reader matter-of-factly as if nothing happened between them, whereas Mark invests much emotion in his messages:

But Mark's emails were always long. He took great pains to tell me what he had been doing recently, where he had been, and how he quarreled with his wife. I didn't know what sort of sense of trust gave him this impulse to confide in me. Maybe a woman who wrote novels was trustworthy because of her understanding and intuition, even if I stole his wedding band, which I had always worn on my thumb because it was really pretty.²⁷

The ring taken as a form of her revenge now means nothing but a ring, a kind of jewelry to decorate her hand. By now, Coco has lost all her confusion as a result of this sexual affair, and she is able to resist the pull of his call for emotional investment.

Coco tries her best to construct her own sexuality and struggles against male control, not without much guilt or shame. Ironically, her contradiction comes from her

desire for pleasure in both body and soul, not from her alleged belief in the split of spirit and flesh. In fact, she would rather have one man—Tian Tian or Mark—if not for their lack of either body or soul. Therefore, her guilt is not that she has two men in her life but that she asks too much from one man. Her “shameless” statement that it is perfect for her to be involved with two men simply presents the male lack.

Both Tian Tian and Mark attempt, successfully to a certain degree, to define and control Coco’s sexuality. Tian Tian’s impotence and his reluctance and inability to face his problem dictate incompleteness of their sexual relation, which he pretends not to notice. He simply shrinks from Coco’s active and deliberate seduction. At the same time, he stresses how his life is in the hand of Coco. When he repeatedly demands that Coco should never lie to him, he means that she should be sexually loyal to him in spite of his sexual indifference to her. This mental control is so severe that Coco’s rebellion takes place in secrecy and that she has to tell him all the time that she loves him and wants to be with him forever. In the end Coco realizes for sure (she always suspects) that Tian Tian knows her affair with Mark, she can no longer pull herself together but fall into unconsciousness. As soon as she wakes up, she talks with Tian Tian about how she has always lied except that she loves him.

Tian Tian bent down, holding me. “I hate you!” he squeezed out these words, each of which seemed to be in danger of explosion at any time. “Because you make me hate myself.” He also cried. “I don’t know how to make love. My existence is just a mistake. I don’t need your sympathy. I should disappear right away.”²⁸

His return to drug is as much about his inability to change as about his punishment for Coco’s disobedience. Indifference to Coco’s begging him to stop, he simply says,

“always with a sad and innocent smile, ‘Coco, I won’t blame you whatever you have done to me. I love you, Coco. Remember, remember this.’”²⁹

Coco plays Mark’s games similarly according to his rules. In spite of the sexual sensations better than the total of what all other men in her life could make her feel, orgasm is not all that Coco desires. Clearly she wants more from Mark, who is not interested in giving to her. It is fair to say that Mark is in for a good time since he never brings up discussions on his marital status and the future, while Coco pretends it to be just a good time, in spite of her realization that she has fallen in love with him. For she has to remind herself that her relationship with Mark should mean nothing but sex. She must steal a few bills from his wallet since she cannot expect anything from Mark in this relationship. As she says, “sex is just sex. Only money and betrayal could defeat the danger of turning sex into love.”³⁰

Tian Tian’s death and Mark’s departure further prove that Coco prefers a harmonious union of flesh and soul to the split reality she has gone through. In order to be completely satisfied, she must kill both Tian Tian and Mark off no matter how much she loves or is attracted to them. The quote about the difference between making love to and sleeping with a person only betrays her wish to have them both.

The threat of uncontrollable female sexuality goes hand in hand with the danger poses by the city as represented by Shanghai, often femininized, demonized and marginalized in modern and contemporary mainstream Chinese literature, film and culture, in opposition to the imagination of the rural, the space of countryside representing nature, innocence and above all, masculinity.³¹ On the one hand, a

dichotomy of the urban vs. the rural has long been established. Although the city for a short while represents enlightenment and modernization, the city in its modern sense has started gradually and steadily to embody darkness, disillusion and death, according to Zhang Yingjin. He asserts that “Western cultural infiltration” since the mid-nineteenth century has associated the city with such negativities as ‘imperialism’ and ‘colonialism.’³² Constantly reminded by foreign concessions of national loss and bombarded with dangerous seductresses of women and money, Chinese critics harbor “a fundamental suspicion of the moral implications of the modern city—in particular its power of penetrating, eroding, and subverting the foundations of Chinese tradition.”³³ The negative imagination of the city is fortified since the 1920s when the leftist politics dominates Chinese cultural space, and is subsequently standardized by the Communist Party as *the* official literary and cultural framework that prioritizes and glorifies the rural from the 1940s on.

The city has long been associated with the danger and corruption of a femme fatale, whose sexuality is objectified, fetishized and penalized in voyeuristic male gaze. Her determined pursuit of pleasure and her career as a prostitution or a dance girl eventually brings to her demise, just like Chen Bailu in Cao Yu’s *Sunrise*. It is a male-centered cultural construct, however. For modern women writers, the city is a space of promises. Instead of following the formula of male gaze, modern and contemporary women authors focus more on the modern, which closely relates to the cultural Westernization. Realizing the impossibility to completely avoid gender hostility, women writers have nonetheless two exciting discoveries:

For a few successful women writers of the 1920s and the 1930s, the city provided access to higher education (available to women for the first time in

Chinese history); as such, the city further represented a prospect of freedom from old patriarchal practices (especially arranged marriages)...The city appeared ... metaphorically, as an infinite imaginary space where they could create a room of their own in the otherwise rigidly defined patriarchal territory.³⁴

Embracing the new space of freedom, many women writers explore gender and female sexuality, inevitably uncovering and criticizing deeply ingrained misogyny ignored or upheld by their male counterparts. Their production of the image of a new modern independent woman, on the other hand, inevitably draws upon Western culture since “modern” is closely linked with cultural westernization. As a result, women writers hold a perilous position between nationalism and colonialism.

The gendered imagination of the city as a *femme fatale* is significant thus at a more profound level. In the literary process of prioritizing the male over the female and the rural over the urban, women writers, who are almost always urban, function rather like *femmes fatale* whose questioning of patriarchy disrupts and deconstructs the male-centered national narratives. In the general reading framework intended to contain this danger, the works of Chinese women writers on many occasions are either misunderstood or deliberately misinterpreted. Their exploration of female sexuality is voyeuristically commercialized, and their social and political critiques are trivialized, ignored and attacked.

From the intellectuals of the 1930s fleeing away from their cities to the rural revolutionary base—Yan’an to the constant re-education of the contemporary intellectuals by the peasants before and during the Cultural Revolution and to the sending down of urban youths to the countryside, the city/woman writer is a guilty concubine to its master, the country/literary patriarchy. No one can help explain the connection

between the city and femininity better than Ding Ling, whose prominent career as an author begins with her sensitive and rebellious *Diary of Miss Sophie*, the urban exploration of female sexuality and sexual freedom, and ends with the revised and re-educated *The Sun Shines on the Sanggan River*, an account of class struggle and the Communist revolution during the Land Reform in the rural area. The shun of the city continues up to now as seen in the “roots” literature and the avant-garde literature, in which the peasants and the countryside (or the traditions) represent China and Chinese realities. In fact, one of the important reasons for the success of the fifth-generation filmmakers is that they for the most part have fixed their gaze on the rural space, which is much less developed than the city and holds 80 percent of the Chinese population.

The 1990s and especially the turn of the century has seen a flourishing of popular and consumer-oriented culture and a renaissance in urban literature. With the elimination of the traditional State-controlled system that not only support writers with fixed wages but more significantly regulates what to write and what not to write, all writers are thrown for the first time into the often times another controlling hand—the control of the reading market. According to Yang Yang in “The New Shifts of Relationships in Chinese Literature of the 1990s,” “however great a piece of works, however unique a writer, as long as they lost the market of the readers or lack the power of competition, would lose their base of survival.” The writers can no longer assume a homogenous “general” public since the readers are quite divided and different generations of writers have their fixed different market³⁵.

In the process of shifting interests, the city as a legitimate imagined space finally emerges into readers' horizon. The enormous commercial success of Chi Li is the best example. Chi Li's urban success stories of ordinary people in Wuhan (one of the major cities in China) not only appeal to the readers but also attract TV producers. While some TV series adapted from *The Birth of Morning Sun* (zhaoyang chushi), *Coming and Going* (lailai wangwang) and *The Lipsticks* (kou hong) are popular among TV audiences, they at the same time promote sales of the original novels. The fact that Wang Anyi's Shanghai-based novel *Ballad of Everlasting Sorrow* won the Mao Dun Literary Award, the highest official award in literature demonstrates that the city, particularly Shanghai, as the imagined space, starts to be accepted, even if it does not relate itself to the official and politically didactic discourses in its subject matters.

It seems that the space of the city is at last recognized by the State for its position in Chinese literature, but ironically with its disassociation from the danger of female sexuality and femme fatale. Female characters often conform to conventional feminine features such as pettiness and jealousy, with a lack of critical voice on gender relations. The goal usually is not to challenge or question the legitimacy of dominant discourses, but to celebrate success in implementing them, often in a neutralized male voice, as in Chi Li's novels. Even if the threat of femininity is focused on, it repeats the old sexist depiction of a femme fatale who must be contained and locked in a remote space of the past, the dark, ugly and stale past, as in Wang Anyi's much acclaimed *Ballad of Everlasting Sorrow*. *Ballad of Everlasting Sorrow* is a tale about the soul of Shanghai, the soul of its past. It condenses all qualities of the Old Shanghai in the 1930s and 1940s into Wang Qiyao, a former Miss Shanghai who becomes the mistress of a powerful nationalist

official who later dies of plane crash right before the Communist takeover. The danger of the female character first lies in the contradiction of her femininity. Her participation in the beauty pageant satisfies voyeuristic male gaze, yet at the same time defying patriarchal domestication of her body. Her relationship with the politician shows that she is utterly passive and not at all in control, while that very decision to be a mistress instead of a wife to another decent man proves her independence of traditional repressive moral principles for women. Second, her past threatens from time to time to disrupt the present, with her memories, her stories, her sense of fashion, her undeniable elegance, and her subtle seduction. Naturally she is killed in the end, forever belonging to the past. With women writers' self-censorship, the city is now safe and under control.

Wei Hui's danger lies in her reviving of the femme fatale as a character and as a woman author, and in its contemporaneity, with the creation of Ni Ke, or Coco, continuing the disruptive intimacy between women and the city. Instead of playing the traditional female role of self-sacrifice for the sake of her man, Coco first and foremost loves herself. It is not to be simply dismissed as narcissistic, but it is a desire to have her own space and be her own person, without any string attached to anyone. She is a young woman who respects her own desires and follows her own heart and mind, resisting any pull to negate her own will. Falling in love with Tian Tain does not domesticate her into a self-sacrificing self-effacing supplementary wife-figure, and she always knows what she wants and does not hesitate to get it, like her affair with Mark.

Unlike the femme fatale who never escapes punishment in male centered literary Coco exonerates herself from any guilt. Instead of a mysterious conspiring killer, she is a

passionate searcher for the meaning of life. Whatever she has done is justified by her passionate love, of Tian Tian and Mark, but above all, of her life and her world. The one word that fills the pages of the book is “love.” Whatever happens, she loves Tian Tian, from the beginning to the end. Like she says, although she lies about the affair, she never lies about loving him. Similarly, love also connects Coco and Mark no matter how many times she tells the readers otherwise.

Second, Wei Hui is dangerous because of her contemporaneity, in comparison to Wang Anyi’s dusty past. Wei Hui as an author is the femme fatale in that her narrative is both seductive to her readers and subversive to patriarchal authorities. Wang Anyi has created a complex crowded, calculating and fascinating colonial and post-colonial Shanghai. It is fascinating in the sense that Wang Anyi takes the stand of an acute observer who provides the most details possible about every little corner of the city and its people. This distance from her works makes her Shanghai an rather passive, less threatening and more enjoyable object of gaze and study. On the other hand, Wei Hui identifies with Shanghai and rebels against it, loving and hating it. The story of Shanghai is the story of Wei Hui/Coco. More significantly, it is also the story of hundreds of thousands of young readers just like Wei Hui/Coco. Without the distance of a detached observer, Wei Hui’s narrative is more inviting to the new generations of readers while Wei Hui/Coco finds more resonance for her thought and her actions, particularly her position on sexuality.

Wei Hui’s Shanghai is “crazy” not only because she allows sex to happen beyond the bedroom or challenges the public of their heterosexual assumptions but because it is about “now” and thus more “real” to its readers. The beauty of a first-class university, the

rather romantic and fashionable life of a university female student and the dark mysterious sexual adventures in popular nightclubs and luxurious hotels have caught the imaginations of contemporary readers, especially young readers who have grown or are growing up with Western music and are much more open-minded and adventurous.

While Wang Anyi's portrayal of sexuality is subtle, Wei Hui is bold to spell it out loud and clear. The nightclubs, the parties, the rock music, the cars, and the handsome men and beautiful women all end up with sex. Even the urban architecture suggests sexually,

specially the Oriental Pearl TV Tower, Asia's tallest. Its long, long steel column pierces the sky, proof of the city's phallic worship. The ferries, the waves, the night-dark grass, the dazzling neon lights, and incredible structures—all these signs of material prosperity are aphrodisiacs the city uses to intoxicate itself.³⁶

To spice up her recipe for a best-seller fiction, Wei Hui throws in the issue of homosexuality in addition to the topic of drugs. It is this “crazy” sexualization of contemporary Shanghai and arousal of contemporary youth that draw attacks, especially moral attacks, from critics.

The alliance between the new woman author and the Westernized modern city produces an ambivalent, double-edge effects for the woman author. On the one hand, she successfully, although probably temporarily, topples down the temple of patriarchal nationalist discourses, with the help of the imported Western culture. On the other hand, she seems to fall into the trap of neocolonialism, particularly to scholars with a post-colonial perspective. This contradiction demonstrates the complexity of the femme fatale as well as the intricate creative space of a woman author in contemporary China. Wei Hui

challenges the critics to think beyond the fixed dichotomy between the West and China (or the rest of the world), and to exam critically the rigidity of nationalist discourses, especially patriotism.

The femme fatale in the post-colonial metropolitan Shanghai produces a hierarchy of masculinity between infantilized Tian Tian, the Chinese boy, and oversexualized Mark, the Western man.³⁷ Throughout the book, Tian Tian is infantilized. He is always referred to as a boy, giving an impression of innocence, immaturity, lack of confidence, and a need for protection. When they first meet, Coco describes him as a “handsome and slender boy” who is in fact a year younger than Coco. Although he initiates their relationship with his note “I love you,” he is basically not committed to it. Their first night finds him sexually impotent, and he cringes later at her seduction. In the end, he simply concludes that he could not do it and therefore he should have never lived. Instead of taking action to fix the problem, he decides to run away from it and turns to drug. Although he lives alone (which is quite unusual, even now) and seems to be independent, he is actually an orphan in need of mothering, instead of a man in pursuit of a girlfriend. His hostility toward his mother not only shows his resentment for her long absence, but it is also a symptom of his intensified desire for a mother. In this sense, Tian Tian is a son searching for his long lost mother, a role that Coco plays. Yet just as he has no control in his mother’s moving away from him, he has no confidence at all in where the relationship will go. He cannot do anything but try to hold on to Coco, evident in his conversation at the beginning of the story. When they talk about his broken family—the death of his father and the schnophrenzic of his grandma—as a result of his mother absence (leaving for and staying in Spain), he already accepts Coco as a lost mother whom he finally finds

but who can abandon him at any time. He tells Coco, “ ‘But I’ve found you. I’ve decided to trust you and stay with you.’ Said he, ‘Don’t be just curious about me. Don’t leave me right away, either.’”³⁸ On the other hand, he promises to be her Muse who ‘will bring you endless inspiration,’³⁹ a rather interesting twist of feminization to the already infantilized Tian Tian. The fear of being abandoned again is expressed over and over again until his death, as a result of her affair with Mark exposed in the end. Tian Tian is ultimately a boy whose sole nutrition is unconditional motherly love.

In turn, Coco treats him like a son. She sees Tian Tian as a cute innocent little kid and often compares him to harmless baby animals. Their kisses are like “little fish swimming,” “sweet” and “gentle.” Moreover, he is “kind and innocent like a little dolphin.”⁴⁰ As he recovers from drug addiction, he has a good appetite “like a little carnivorous animal.”⁴¹ He is very thin, and the only time he seems to have some weight is when he loses his consciousness out of drug overdose. Even then, he is like “a little elephant.”⁴² Like a mother, she encourages him to develop his artistic talent and helps him gain back confidence by selling his paintings to college students. It is her idea in the first place, and she is in charge during all the transactions, for “Tian Tian was embarrassed and afraid to sell on streets.” She is protective, nonnegotiable about the prices, which reflect the value of his labor. It is not that Coco is “naturally” maternal, but she is maternal only toward Tian Tian. In her words, “[b]eside the shy Tian Tian, I had to be brave and confident, although I was quite nervous, when I was little, when my mom asked me just to go and buy a loaf of bread at the bakery. My little hands were sweaty, clinching on the bills.”⁴³ Thus, the twenty-four-year-old Tian Tian is as immature as the little girl Coco has been. Coco describes Tian Tian to her therapist that “the boy that I

love cannot give me perfect sex for once. He cannot even give me a sense of security. He does drugs, is indifferent to life, and has left me for the south, with a kitten. As if he will leave me any time. I mean leaving forever.”⁴⁴

In comparison to Tian Tian, Mark seems to be the perfect manly man, which is established as soon as he is introduced in the story. While Tian Tian is “a handsome and slender boy,”⁴⁵ Coco’s first impression of Mark is “a tall Western man in big strides.”⁴⁶ Mark is not a baby like Tian Tian who needs to be taken good care of. He is a mature man with confidence and determination. “Here comes a tall Western man.” Said Coco when she receives Mark’s phone call. According to Coco,

I didn’t have to worry about him at all. He was a man at the center of the mainstream society. Handsome and smart, he had an enviable job, good at dealing with all sorts of complicated and difficult social relations and good at self-balance (he was a typical Libra). As far as his relations with women are concerned, he was also like fish in water.

As long as he wanted, he would find a way to get in touch with me even if I took off to the Antarctica.

His strength seemed to be bestowed by Zeus while Tian Tian was exactly the opposite.⁴⁷

Coco does not play a mother role in this relationship. She does not need to, for he is already in control. In fact, she becomes a little child in front of Mark, who responds decidedly to her hints and seduction. Coco compares her on more than one occasion to a child: once she is in his bed, “nodding hard, rather childishly” to his inquiry whether she would like some wine⁴⁸; and at another time he “held me like a dead baby in his arms” right after their rendezvous in a women’s restroom. Nothing is more telling than the first time when Coco decides to “make mistakes,” that is, to start a real affair with Mark. Contrary to Tian Tian’s desperate reactions, Mark fully displays his much anticipated masculinity. Coco informs the reader, “[a]s soon as I said it, he reached out and grabbed

me. Like a bank robber who did not allow any explanations, he quickly carried me out of the art gallery and put me in his Buick.”⁴⁹ Coco reacts “obediently.”⁵⁰

Mark’s strength is embodied in his insatiable masculine sexuality. His private part is “shockingly big” and he is often compared to a Fascist in bed, a savage, a tribe chief of cannibals, a soldier, and a beast. He watches Coco like a predator watching over his prey. He never fails to deliver extreme pleasure and orgasm. Most importantly, he succeeds in making Coco in love with him, turning this sexual adventure into a love affair. In this sense, he truly defeats Tian Tian, body and soul.

This neocolonial hierarchy of sexuality is supported from time to time with Coco’s comments on the difference between the Western and the Oriental. She does not hesitate to show her admiration of the color of “white” skin and her attraction to the eyes of white men. To her, the success of Gong Li, considered No. 1 actress in China, is that she and her filmic characters have managed to charm thousands of European white men. However, the beauty of the Western women is undeniable. On first meeting Eva—Mark’s wife, Coco betrays her sense of internalized inferiority:

Eva held [Mark’s] hand, fuller and more beautiful than her pictures I’d seen. Her blond hair was tied simply in a bunch behind her head, her ears decorated with a row of silver studs. A black sweater set off her white skin, the kind of whiteness sending out in the sun sweet and dreamy fragrance.

The beauty of white women could sink thousands of battleships (like Helen of Troy). In comparison, the beauty of yellow women was rather on their knit brows and enchanting eyes, always as if they walked off from a calendar of an amorous time in the past (like Sandy Lam or Gong Li).⁵¹

Coco’s comparison shows her lack of knowledge of Chinese history, which does not lack beautiful women blamed for the fall of cities and empires. However, it is oversimplistic to thus conclude that Coco has no value except a post-colonial complex. While

critics influenced by post-colonial studies rightly focus on the power hierarchy between the West and China, they nonetheless essentialize that power hierarchy, as if the West is a fixed homogeneous entity that is necessarily and inherently evil, without critical investigation of the repressiveness of nationalism. As said earlier, Coco as a new Chinese female writer tries to negotiate a creative space for herself, among the entanglement of various power relations between men and women, and between the West and the East. She is sometimes ambitious and confident, while confused and vulnerable at other times. The post-colonial complex is only a part of her growing pains as well as a form of rebellion against the tight control of Chinese tradition and authority. If we regard Coco/Wei Hui not as a fixed finished product but a developing writer in search of a path of her own, Coco's lack of a critical eye toward the Western culture would be forgivable, if not understandable. The end of the story tells us that everything is just a past to her, after all. What is real and existing is her writing and herself as a writer, who never stops asking the question, "Who am I?"⁵²

Sex Sells: Beauty Writer, Hot Criticism and the Media Sensation

It is emblematic of the contemporary Chinese culture that the Wei Hui controversy has focused as much, if not more, on the body of the writer as on the body of her text. If, as Dong Limin argues, "the sudden success of the post-1970s novelists is a classic battle in which commercial interest successfully infiltrates and even transforms the structure of literature,"⁵³ I believe that this "classic battle" is not at all limited to literature. More than ever, it directly influences the field of criticism. In fact, the

commercialization of literature has been accompanied by the popular-ization of (sexist and voyeuristic) literary and cultural criticism, intimately related to mass media.

Popularized literary and cultural criticism walks hand in hand with mass media. Such popular criticism is first eagerly endorsed and published by mass media, and then ambitiously promoted with exciting and exaggerated follow-ups by journalists with their entertainment news. While Coco/Wei Hui contemplates about the making of a new woman writer, she is already being made in the news and gossip columns of the media, which are too lazy to try to understand the many contradictions of female sexuality in *Shanghai Baby* while too superficial to miss the opportunity to profit from a juicy topic such as sex. If Wei Hui succeeds in taking advantage of the mass media to promote her book and her self-image, the media does not hesitate either to abuse her for their own profit. Under the pressure of money, “the critic is dead,” states Wu Zilin.⁵⁴

Wu asserts that the biggest problem facing literary criticism in the context of popular culture is its fakeness, trendiness and vulgarization. In other words, literary criticism is overshadowed by “quasi-criticism” that “takes on a personalized, privatized and popularized writing position and hankers after producing heated topics.”⁵⁵ Therefore, instead of serious criticism and reviews, we have “cool review” (ku ping) that either flatters or kills a book and an author, often not from the analysis of the work but by prying into the private life of the author satisfying and creating a voyeuristic desire of the audience. Although the cultural context of an author and/or work is an important element in exploring the meanings of the author’s works (which is what I am doing here), what emerges in China in the late 1990s to a large degree focuses only on “producing heated topics”⁵⁶ that sell well, namely money and sex (jinqian meise).

The intimate working relation between popular criticism and mass media is already evident in the well-known “debate between Shanxi critics and Shanxi writers.” The center of the discussion was no other than “money.” It started with a comment, published at a local newspaper, which emphasized how much “famous writers” or “writing masters” earned, how many gifts they received, and how they were lazy and not working hard at producing more and better pieces of writing. The conclusion was that the skills of these writers were getting worse and worse and as a result, they did not deserve the honor the people had bestowed upon them. While it is questionable whether this commentary is qualified to be called “literary criticism” except in its popular sense, it is simply a comment that is different, but no more or no less than other comments. However, the mass media quickly realized how valuable this piece of criticism was as a cultural commodity. Immediately, this article was published on front pages of different newspapers and naturally it greatly boosted the sales of the newspapers.

Naturally the journalists wanted to continue this “hot” sale of this “hot” topic. They tried to interview the authors times and again and transferred whatever they got onto the newspapers. At first the writers simply brushed aside the criticism on their works, but later they said that the critic had gone too far from literary criticism to personal attack. At the same time, the journalists managed to interview the critic who satisfied them with another angry article that accused the authors of ignoring serious literary criticism, for the authors did not respond to his criticism on their works but only to his criticism on their personal life. This toss-of-the-ball between the authors and the critic, facilitated by journalists, was a great commercial success for the newspapers. But as far as literary criticism is concerned, it only exposes its complicity with the popular

culture and at best its inadequacy and impotence in the face of the power of the market economy that frivolizes literary criticism. Expecting the writer to play the role of an enlightener, the commentaries were a response, an extreme yet ineffective response, to the fact of the so-called “red packet criticism” (hong bao pi ping) by “red packet critics” who flatter certain works, surrendering themselves to the pressure of money and power of authors or publishers. Ironically, this particularly critic also falls into the trap of commercial culture and has himself been transformed as a commodity.

The Wei Hui controversy is simply another performance of this cooperation between pseudo-critics and entertaining journalists, popular criticism and mass media. To make it even more appealing, the commercialization of cultural critique is sexed up with the commodification of femininity, in the case of Wei Hui. Wei Hui’s *Shanghai Baby* cleverly connects Coco’s body to her writing, and Coco’s deliberate combination of a sexual body with a rebellious mind is evident in the public image of Wei Hui the writer, who is often seen in Coco’s clothes, like the black qi-pao, decorated with “a majestically beautiful peony in center front,” which she wears in the picture on the back cover of *Shanghai Baby*. Similarly, Wei Hui implements Coco’s business strategy of catching packaging to promote her book and her writer image.

While Wei Hui celebrates the publication of her *The Butterfly’s Shriek* with a party of Coco’s design, in which she tears up her book while dancing in its pieces, she creates media sensation for *Shanghai Baby* with her book tours. Unfortunately, the media and the public have conveniently ignored any possible deeper messages of hers but taken everything at face value. While Wei Hui successfully shocks the public with her stardom as a new writer, she is certainly shocked by the more successful remaking of a demonized

Wei Hui in the media. On the one hand, Wei Hui the writer is highly sexualized, caricaturized and demonized; and on the other, Wei Hui's writing *Shanghai Baby* is routinely pornographized and dismissed.

What happens to her is a continuation of objectification of the female body and of the female writing as pleasurable commodities to be consumed, a cultural attitude prevalent in the 1990s, produced and reinforced by a certain collective sexism and voyeurism of trendy and conservative literary and cultural criticism, encouraged and strengthened by the circulation of mass media (particularly newspapers and tabloids), and further promoted by the availability of the internet technology.

Pornographizing Shanghai Baby with Hot Reviews (ku ping)

The Wei Hui controversy started with a "hot review" by Li Fang published on *China Youth Daily* on March 13, 2000.⁵⁷ Titled "Are You a Beauty? Then Go and Be A Writer," the review establishes a standard interpretation that has more or less influenced what the media and all sorts of critics/readers have to say about Wei Hui and her work. It first demonizes Wei Hui's exploration of female sexuality as worse than pornography. In his words, "I had collected, without my father's awareness, posters of nudity; but what is happening to me with Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baby*, a novel with much sexual exposure? Why did I puke, not even finishing a half of it?" As if to show that his reaction has nothing to do with his being a male reader, he tells his readers that his female friend also puked when she was asked to write like Wei Hui:

Imitating Wei Hui, she took great pains to come up with a beginning, but then started to puke. So she called the publisher and said, I really can't do such a thing, and you will have to find someone else. I felt sorry for her and said, your reluctance to give it all up leads your career as a female writer to an ending

before it even starts.⁵⁸

To a person whose brain can process nothing but sex in Wei Hui's book, "to write like Wei Hui" is simply distorted into "to write pornography." No wonder both have puked. Their pornographic mis/understanding of Wei Hui will make many others puke.

Secondly, the article categorizes Wei Hui as one of the "Beauty Writers" who promotes her look more than her talent, although Li admits Wei Hui's skills in "language and techniques." While he is right to point out that a collective voyeurism creates a market for star-packaging young female writers, it is absolutely arrogant of him to devalue young women writers in general because of their looks. As he says, "Nowadays the most foolish thing is probably to be a young male writer, while the most fashionable choice is to be a young female writer." For male writers, it is hard work and "real stuff," while for female writers it is only a fashion that is frivolous and superficial. Since he, with a sexist voyeuristic desire, has bought Wei Hui's book because of her beautiful picture, Wei Hui is therefore worthless and disgusting enough to make him throw up.

The root of Li's problem is already explained without him knowing it. He is exactly the hypocrite he denies to be. He pukes for the reason that "younger female writers write about the thing that I haven't experienced but had once truly wanted to experience and yet would have probably make me run away if it really happened to me." "That thing" is not just sexuality, but the dangerous sexuality of the femme fatale. His voyeuristic desire attracts him to *Shanghai Baby*, but his fear of female sexuality can only be justified with his attack of the book and the author.

In a later response to the questioning of some (female) readers, he spells this fear out clearly that it is the idea of young independent women actively seeking and enjoying

sexual pleasure that has made men including him panic. Nonetheless, Wei Hui, with her “post-1970s contemporaries, is “officially” oversexualized, starting waves of negative personal attacks in the name of review on Wei Hui. The attacks are especially meaningful when male writers act as critics.

“Hot Reviewing Wei Hui” is blatantly sexist. Written by Wei Jie, a male writer who tries his best to disassociate himself from Wei Hui despite the shared “Wei” in their names, Wei Jie shows off his contempt of a female sexual body while considering Wei Hui as a prostitute and her work “a prostitute memoir,” based on “suspicious facts from Wei Hui’s experiences and her novel.” He accuses Wei Hui of too much exposure, “buck-naked and still presenting her private part to the public. Such a female body has absolutely no value at all.” He then suggests that Wei Hui must have been standing on the side of the road, like other prostitutes, trying to attract “customers.” Retelling the story of his female friend dumping a glass of wine onto Wei Hui because she does not like Wei Hui, he suggests that she should have used sulphuric acid to destroy her face so that Wei Hui the writer would disappear forever from literary circle as a result of the loss of her pretty face.⁵⁹ This intense hatred and demonization of women’s sexuality betrays his recognition of the dangerous power of the female body that needs to be contained or punished.

Although there are articles that respond in defense of Wei Hui to such biased understanding of Wei Hui and *Shanghai Baby*, these voices have been silenced and dismissed, just like the writer, by the media. In comparison with these defenses, scandalous topics of sex and money are certainly more profitable. Therefore, instead of publishing more serious readings of Wei Hui, the media indulges in scandalizing her.

Scandalizing Beauty Writer with Hot News

In step with hot reviews that have pornographized *Shanghai Baby* and thus its author, the media have taken pains to prove them with a carefully fabricated image of “bad woman” with corrupting sexuality and morality. Whatever intentions Wei Hui might have had in the beginning—whatever image she might have wanted to create and whatever message she might have wished to convey—are sabotaged with exaggeration and distortion in the media pressured by commercial competition. Shocked by Wei Hui’s words and actions, no one seems to care that the Wei Hui that they know through media is an edited Wei Hui, designed to sell not for herself but for specific newspapers. Profiting from their deliberately created “hot selling spots” on Wei Hui, the media at the same time have found their scapegoat, oversexualized and demonized.

The image of “bad woman” starts with a frivolous stardom image of “Beauty Writer” who sells her looks in the name of talent, a negative twist of Wei Hui’s rebellion against the serious faces of Chinese intellectual. Long before the obvious connection established between the body and the text in *Shanghai Baby*, Wei Hui was showcased, along with other “post-1970s” writers, in the well-known literary magazine *Writer* in July 1998. Besides their writings, the magazine published several pictures of this group of writers, who were all young and pretty. Instead of standing with colleagues attending some literary conferences or before a common scenery spot, these writers appear in bars or nightclubs and pose for the camera eye. One of Wei Hui’s picture, a glamorous shot indeed, had Wei Hui in a traditional *qi-pao* (cheongsam) leaning her chin in her palms and was thus explained: “Metamorphosis from a professional writer to a beauty.”⁶⁰ On

the other hand, the front cover of *Shanghai Baby*, a practice of Coco's theory of book promotion (the formula of attractive cover with intellectual content), also conveys this message. Designed by Wei Hui herself, it is covered mostly by a picture of the author, long straight hair on the shoulder and four characters—shang hai bao bei (Shanghai baby)—on the chest. Reports say that she wrote the characters on her own and hired professional make-up artists and photographer to shoot it.⁶¹

While there was a separate commercial trend to promote “beauty writers,” the term “Beauty Writer” has soon become a frequently used, frivolous and mostly negative vocabulary to refer to women writers of the younger generation, named “post-1970s writers” after the fact that all of these writers were born after 1970, which makes it possible for them to escape the memories of political turmoil of the 1966-1976 Great Cultural Revolution that has left indelible mental scars to the previous generation. Different from remembering a remote past shaken by the Cultural Revolution, these writers concentrate on the present and the future, largely influenced by Western popular cultures. Distancing from previous generations of writers, they are eager to establish themselves with their individuality and write themselves into existence. Mainly focusing on the lives and problems of young urban women, these writers are confident not only of their talent but their looks. Unfortunately, it is their looks that the media have picked up and made a fuss about.

The Chengdu book tour is significant in that Wei Hui as a Beauty Writer has officially emerged only to be attacked and soon officially banned. During the few days of and after the book tour, major newspapers, including their online versions, in Sichuan and nationwide, have fed the public with entertainment news titled such as “Wei Hui Made

Readers Scream,” “Wei Hui Was Really Wild,” “Three Questions for Shanghai Baby,” “Wei Hui Wants to Publish a Picture Album,” or “Wui Hui Took Her Wildness to the End,” blurring the distinction between the author and the character while creating a superficial affected star rather than a talented writer.

The recurring image in the media is a flirtatious Wei Hui in heavy make-ups and low cut black dress showing off her Shanghai baby’s breasts and blowing kisses to her (male) fans while smoking. Most of the news reports focus on Wei Hui’s look, which is seen as “disappointing” in comparison to her pictures. Even when intending to deal with her writing and her thought, the reports never forget to accentuate her superficiality and her desire to show off. *Western China City Daily* has some of the more objective reports on Wei Hui. “Wei Hui Made Readers Scream” describes one of Wei Hui’s book-signing meetings, and is not one-sidedly negative. It tells that many young female readers have had some hearty talks with Wei Hui and also had books for Wei Hui to sign while most of the male fans just want to see her instead of purchasing the book. In the end a middle-aged male reader praises Wei Hui’s writing style and compares her to French novelist Zora. On the other hand, the report does clearly state that Wei Hui takes “Beauty Writer” as her banner, along with her “black silk cheongsam, blue embroidered high heel, embroidered cotton handbag and perfume that has the scent of Shanghai night.”⁶²

In another more detailed report titled “Wei Hui Is Really Wild,” more space is given to Wei Hui’s comments on her book and on negative reviews. She points out that some readers and critics have mistaken her semi-autobiography as autobiography. She also clarifies some of the characteristics of the new generation, such as “independence, creativity, love of life” as well as “being rebellious and wild.” It is interesting that one of

the readers, most likely female, asked the male readers an interesting question, “Would you be scared if you met a woman like Wei Hui in your life?” The report does not clarify responses from readers, although Wei Hui’s answer is positive because “Chinese men love lady-like women who won’t get mold if put at home.” However, it starts with unflattering portrayal of Wei Hui with “heavy make-ups and cigarettes, and dressed in a rather vulgar/worldly manner.”⁶³

On the other hand, another Sichuan-based newspaper *Tian Fu Morning* (tian fu zao bao) looks at Wei Hui negatively throughout, even to the point of fabrication, starting with Dai Yanni’s semi-caricature of Wei Hui in her meeting with fans. Directly referring Wei Hui as “Shanghai baby,” Dai describes how arrival of police (to keep order and security) “greatly strengthened the look and status of this ‘Shanghai baby.’ Wei Hui in black cheongsam and with long hair slowly entered, casually lighting up a cigarette. Excited audiences almost lost control, screaming ambiguous “oh—ohs” one after another.”⁶⁴ The deliberate production of a “dirty” or low-taste Wei Hui is evident, particularly in comparison to Dai’s more calm and respectful description of another writer’s book-signing within the same report. In comparison to the “ambiguous” but rather sexually suggesting screams of Wei Hui’s fans, screams of Bai Yansong’s fans are treated just as screams. Interestingly, police are also called in to keep order because of the huge turnout of fans. However, Dai states that police presence is just for safety instead of helping the writer as she presents in Wei Hui’s case. In contrast to Wei Hui’s flirtatious manner, this other writer Bai is calm and mature, more like a gentleman when dealing with fans’ excitement. “Naturally” Dai draws different conclusions. While she admits both book-signing parties are successful, she has a question for Wei Hui’s fans: “are they

passionate for Wei Hui, or for Wei Hui's book?" Compromising the integrity of Wei Hui's fans, Dai at the same time questions the integrity and value of Wei Hui as a writer.

Dai Yanni continues this negative presentation of Wei Hui in two following news reports. "Chendu People Questioning Shanghai Baby" explicitly attacks both Wei Hui and her book in the words of a teacher, a clerk, a student and a critic, comparing her to prostitution: "Actresses take off their clothes to get fame. Now female writers can also take off their clothes to be famous. They even compete to see who is more thorough."⁶⁵ The other piece of news tells about a Chendu female writer who, as a "big sister," warns Wei Hui that she should have integrity as a woman and as a woman writer, instead of misleading the younger generation with her immoral writing on sexuality, which is like "strip-dancing on the street."⁶⁶

Wei Hui is not simply negatively represented but negatively produced, especially in the infamous Chengdu Portrait Picture Incident (cheng du xie zhen shi jian), in which Wang Yan the unapologetic journalist, supported by her newspaper *Tian Fu Morning*, demonizes Wei Hui's body based on fabricated "facts" and "quotes." The aftermath proves to be more disturbing when the journalist is seen to be simply doing her job while Wei Hui is still condemned in consensus, leading to the ban of her book in a month.

In the midst of vilifying Wei Hui, *Tian Fu Morning* adds fuel to the flames on April 4 with a more destructive portrayal of Wei Hui in her own words and action. This short news titled "Wei Hui Wants to Publish a Portrait Album" gossips about Wei Hui's experience of picture shooting for a local magazine, and it does not waste any words: it attacks Wei Hui's looks, morals, conducts and taste from the beginning to the end. Only,

this is not news reporting, but news making. First of all, Wang Yan was not present during the photo shooting session. Second, despite her many quotes from Wei Hui and the photographer, the journalist Wang Yan did not interview either one of them. All her “news” comes from a casual talk with the photographer (a friend of hers) bragging his shooting experience with Wei Hui. A later report on another local newspaper tells that all of Wang Yan’s quotes are either untrue or “taken out of context.”⁶⁷ Yet the damage is done and Wei Hui is deep in negativity.

The title is very suggestive since actresses usually shoot bold sexy picture of themselves and publish a whole album of such pictures in hope of attracting more attention and obtaining more star-power. Therefore, the title itself compares Wei Hui to actresses, implying that she succeeds because of her body rather than her brain.⁶⁸

The report starts with Wei Hui’s look, “which disappointed many of her fans.” While making clear that Wei Hui is not pretty, the journalist Wang Yan equates Wei with her character Ni Ke. There is nothing seriously wrong in comparing the two, but what is disturbing is the description of them, represented by a “unique Wei-style expression—poor taste, coquettishness, unruliness and sluttishness.” This is immediately supported by Wei Hui’s pictures, in which she does not wear her bra under her “black hollowed-out sweater.” Another picture shows that Wei Hui has on a pink halter shirt, “a cheap street product” as the journalist says. “With a cigarette dangling from her lips and her many-ringed hand on her hip, she looks at first glance like a woman who sells jewelry.” Again, this judgment is immediately followed by a quote from the photographer, who confirms Wei Hui’s poor taste in fashion.”⁶⁹

The last part of the news focuses on Wei Hui's immorality. According to the journalist, Wei Hui has changed her clothes numerous times, and she "changed three sets of clothes in front of the photographer, without even having her bra on." As if to show how shameless Wei Hui is, the report tells that Wei Hui continues to shoot her pictures (possibly changing her clothes, which the journalist does not clarify but implies) even in presence of three other men who came for her signature and were lucky enough to be able to take pictures with her in the end. The journalist concludes with a convincing quote from the same photographer: "according to the photographer, Wei Hui were very satisfied with the pictures and said, 'This trip is pressed for time. Otherwise, I will surely shoot my portrait album here.'"⁷⁰ Thus, Wei Hui's "morbid" addiction to body exposure is fully "exposed."

While people are shocked with Wei Hui's immorality, not very many people seem to care about the real truth about news-reporting. It seems that under the pressure of money and competition, newspapers and journalists feel justified to stretch and distort the facts in order to get bigger paychecks and bonuses. Therefore, Wang Yan was supported and protected by her newspaper, which benefited greatly from the published fabrication: it certainly sold like crazy and Wang Yan got the paycheck she had wanted for months. She was also forgiven and understood by the magazine involved. It is funny that Wang's supervisor asked Wu Fei, the journalist from *Beijing Youth Daily* who interviewed all parties involved in order to get the bottom of the whole incident, to report "objectively" and "justly."

Apparently, Wu Fei's truth was not as exciting as lies. *Tian Fu Morning's* continuous attack on Wei Hui's body shows a kind of journalist hypocrisy tolerated and

even encouraged by a nationalist sentiment. The newspaper did exactly the same thing it had criticized Wei Hui for: selling professionalism for money. The major difference was that Wei Hui was honest about commercial power while the newspaper lied in the name of truth. However, the newspaper's action was allowed because of the fact that its attack on Wei Hui coincided with a nationalist control of the female body. As a result, reports on Wei Hui the quiet, intelligent and serious writer were ignored.⁷¹

With that in mind, we would find it easy to understand why the so-called “beauty writers”—Wei Hui definitely included—were considered at fault in a survey conducted by Netease, a Chinese internet service provider. The survey asked internet surfers this question, “In what do you think Beauty Writers ‘made mistakes?’” Therefore, the female writers were already guilty as soon as the survey started. Of 6645 people, 48.6% chose “writing was not as pretty as their looks,” while 32.2% believed that “the trouble was caused by their beauty.” Another 19.2% thought that “they fell into the trap of the publishing houses.”⁷² It was rather impressive that the survey recognized the significant role played by the publishers; however, it did not attempt to turn negativities from the writers. On the contrary, it took the guilt of “beauty writers” as a given, instead of looking seriously at the tremendous role of the media in creating these writers’ mistakes.

To be honest, Wei Hui on the Chengdu book tour has done something that no other writers had done before: to establish her difference as an individual writer and as a new-generation writer. While other writers simply assume their differences from each other, Wei Hui considers the book tour as a precious opportunity to promote her difference and truly enjoys it, quite different from most writers who participate simply under the pressure of the publishers striving for profits. Wei Hui is rather ambivalent

toward the consumer culture. While she might not like everything of the popular culture, she has actively used it for her own good, including money and fame (although she claims that she has not profit much). Therefore, it is no surprise that her difference is immediately commodified, which is exactly what she wants—to make writing fashionable and popular.

Sensationalizing Beauty Catfights

While Wei Hui might expect all the heated talks on what she said and did on the book tour, it was certainly a surprise when she found herself in a vicious “war between beauty writers” or “war between Wei Hui and Mian Mian.” This time her crime was not “being too different” but “being too similar.” The magazine *Reading Guide* (*yue du dao kan*) published on April 8, 2000 a chart that compared certain passages from *Shanghai Baby* and from Mian Mian’s *La La La* and concluded that Wei Hui plagiarized from the works by Mian Mian since *La La La* was published earlier than *Shanghai Baby*. While this “hot” war was repeatedly exposed on newspapers, it was mostly conducted in cyberspace. In fact, the website NetEase formed special forums on “Beauty Writers,” “Post-1970s Generation,” and “Wei Hui/Mian Mian: Who Started it.”⁷³ According to one sender, there were more than 4,000 messages posted within a week and there might be ten times as many people who were simply reading without replying. Wei Hui as the immoral and superficial antagonist is further and fully developed while few people might even notice how much impact government control has on the “united” efforts to put down Wei Hui.

Various newspapers certainly published opinions of the experts -- writers, professors, researchers, and critics of literature and culture -- on this battle on plagiarism. Very few people have considered the responsibility of the media, and Liu Jianwei, a mainstream writer known for his anti-corruption novels, trivializing it by defining both Wei Hui and Mian Mian as “being bold and shameless.”⁷⁴ However, Li Dawei rightly points out “the vicious and vulgar criticism in the Wei Hui/Mian Mian debate,” which focuses not on textual analysis but on attacking the personality and character of Wei Hui, a culturally and politically underprivileged young woman writer.⁷⁵

For example, the poet Hang Dong argues that the cultural signs like “bar” and “drug,” which appear often in *Shanghai Baby*, are first “invented” and used by Mian Mian and thus belong to Mian Mian. At the same time the writer Chen Cun does not even attempt to hide his contempt for Wei Hui’s “superficiality” when he compares her to a child who is so excited at her first experience with delicious meat that she goes about telling everyone that she has had some meat. He even discloses a personal story about Wei Hui, who once wrote him saying that she wanted to join the Communist Party and (in order to) get the scholarship while at Fudan University. In his words, a person like Wei Hui has a bad character. As far as the works of Wei Hui and Mian Mian, he believes that Wei Hui’s is bad since Wei Hui’s attitude toward drug is either unclear or fashion-driven while Mian Mian after her own experience with drug really hates drug and thus her work is of a better-quality.⁷⁶ In fact, this is also one of the arguments made by Mian Mian’s fans: that only people with painful drug experience can write about drug with honesty and responsibility. In other words, Wei Hui is “trivializing” the pains of drug

addicts since she has not gone through it. Or since Wei Hui has not gone through it, she must be copying from Mian Mian who “truly” went through it.

This debate of authenticity continues its attack on Wei Hui herself in Mian Mian’s shallow article “Wei Hui Did Not Copy Me,” published in *The Reading Guide*. Stating that her own works do not represent anybody else but herself, Mian Mian concludes that Wei Hui cannot represent women, especially Shanghai women. Instead of providing any textual evidence, Mian Mian fills her article with “authentic” holier-than-thou snobbery against anyone from outside Shanghai, a cultural legacy considered typical to Shanghaiese as a result of its history as a colonial metropolitan. Thus Mian Mian speaks with the authority of an “authentic” Shanghai resident that “Wei Hui is not a Shanghai resident at all ... It seems that Wei Hui hates Shanghai people.” Therefore, Wei Hui is a fake Shanghai baby, a pathetic newcomer who out of low self-esteem imitates and fantasizes being a Shanghai girl, and at the same time could never be. Therefore, unlike the real Shanghai baby who is always up-to-date with the ever changing international fashion, Wei Hui, along with her heroine, is really a little country bum who does not know about class or the Western customs since she does not know that chocolate has different colors and that “rich people in the west eat chocolate very carefully” in order to “protect their teeth.” Mian Mian’s emphatic “disclosure” of Wei Hui’s personal background—a low-class outsider compared to the “real” Shanghai girls—was followed by her fans and by other writers.⁷⁷

Zhong Kun, another woman writer categorized as one of the “Post-1970s,” posted a message “The Shameless Is Fearless” (wu chi zhe wu wei) on NetEase that attacked Wei Hui -- her book and her person, particularly the status of Wei Hui as not a “genuine”

Shanghaiese. However, she later posted another message “Why Was I Angry” that made obvious and questionable her motives for attacking Wei Hui earlier. In the later message, she said that she was upset because she was one of four writers that were on the black list of the government. She could not understand it and repeatedly said that she had been loyal to the authority. In her own words, “I have always been attacking Wei Hui, and even wrote ‘The Shameless Is Fearless’ to post online. When the Propaganda Ministry issued the ban [for *Shanghai Baby*], I called their action ‘deserving’ (da kuai ren xin).”⁷⁸

This information is a timely reminder of the tight grip the government has on literary and cultural production. The seemingly personal fights between individual writers and Wei Hui may not be personal after all. It is hard to believe that what happened between these writers could have a lot to do with the political authorities, and at the same time it is interesting and sad to note that the vulgarization of literary criticism, as seen in the case of *Shanghai Baby*, is encouraged by the government and practiced by some people for their own good. Another example is the change of attitude of the editor from Spring Wind Publishing House. As the publisher of *Shanghai Baby*, they highly praised the book although soon they “filed a report and requested a nationwide ban” one day after Beijing banned the book.⁷⁹ Clearly the publisher’s action was dictated by politics.

However, as Li Dawei said, Wei Hui before and during this debate seemed sincere and honest as a writer. In a response to Mian Mian, Wei Hui said, with determination, what her heroine says in the book: “I will become a best-seller writer.” As the term “best-seller” and “best-seller writers” were relatively new to China, it was no surprise that Wei Hui was trying to define and create the person she wanted to be. In fact, it seems that Wei Hui was consciously constructing on the Chengdu book tour a persona -

- Wei Hui the writer, a persona that was created in her different stories including *Shanghai Baby*, a persona that was supposed to be similar yet different from herself. In other words, Wei Hui the writer was wilder, bolder and more complicated and thus more interesting to the public. In fact, this conscious construction of Wei Hui the writer was a continuation of what she was doing in her book that on many occasions lets out honest yet sarcastic comments on Coco struggling to be a writer, a best-seller writer. Once Coco excitedly told the reader that she dreamt of being a best-seller writer who would take as parts of the plot murder, drug, sex, violence, adultery, etc. When she told us about her everyday activities, she light-heartedly commented on a meeting she would attend, a meeting on Fudan University campus where the female students would like to listen to her view on feminism and women's rights while the male students would ask her questions like, "Would you ever elope with your boyfriend, Miss Ni Ke?"⁸⁰ However, the public and the authorities seemed to be oblivious of this effort on the part of the author. On the contrary, they were ready to identify Wei Hui with her character since the book conveniently marketed itself as partially autobiographical. When the media was overwhelmed with negative reviews on Wei Hui, her book, and her "quarrel" with Mian Mian, Wei Hui said with some sarcasm and some indifference, in one of her online messages to Mian Mian and the fans, that the person the media and some readers were burning in the fire was simply a Wei Hui that had nothing to do with herself.⁸¹

A poem "About Wei Hui" by Shen Haobo, written in May 2000, vividly captures the truth in the making of the Wei Hui scandal:

A twenty-something-year-old Shanghai writer
Who is rather pretty
Is called by the media
Beauty Writer

Because of a novel
Wei Hui is recently extremely famous
The title of the book is very dubious
No other than *Shanghai Baby*
Which is full of
Plain sexual scenes
This book is an overnight success
Wei Hui enjoys great popularity
She even begins to learn
In front of journalists
To change clothes
Saying to show them
Shanghai baby's breasts
On another occasion
When the journalist came for an interview
She was buck-naked
Writing in front of the computer
Are these rumors real or not?
No evidence at present
But this is certain:
These gossips
Within the so-called cultural circle
Are being hotly circulated.
While they excitedly
Talk about these things
All look immensely proud
As if to show off
Their favorite porno show
Or as if each one of them
Just saw
Shanghai baby's two
Unscrupulous breasts
And right after these gentlemen
Fully enjoy their talks
They will express at Wei Hui's behaviors
Enough
Contempt and indignation
Some are bitter
Some are cynical⁸²

It Is A Man's World: Nation, Gender, and the Cultural Production of Authenticity

While the mass media construct a caricaturized Wei Hui with exaggerated and distorted gossips, literary critics have, in the grand name of academic research and

criticism, produced a standard meaning of abnormality for Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baby*, endorsing and legitimating the official ban on the book. The consensual condemnation of Wei Hui in the form of literary criticism has not only officially sent *Shanghai Baby* to hell, but more importantly it has sentenced literary criticism itself to death. In other words, the *Shanghai Baby* controversy reflects not just the critical condition of contemporary Chinese literature. To a larger extent, it shows the crisis of the male-centered nationalist xenophobic and homophobic contemporary Chinese literary criticism, which, "as a discourse of legitimation," has imposed silence and censorship to those works outside nationalist discourses while canonizing other works with prescribed nationalistic meanings.⁸³

In "Literary Criticism as a Discourse of Legitimation," Lydia Liu argues that modern Chinese literary criticism is gendered in its erasure of gender difference while promoting "a politics of universal representation" that conceals an "unmarked condition of gendered investment" in "the masculinist-nationalist discourse."⁸⁴ This kind of literary criticism not only neutralizes male perspectives but also puts women's writings in a male gaze. In other words, the value of women's writing depends on to what degree it conforms to male perspectives. Although nationalist revolutionary literature that stresses on class struggle stands out among all competing literary theories, the issue of representation has always been problematic. On the other hand, Lydia Liu states that national literature for modern Chinese writers is closely associated with a desire to "produce a national canon worthy of being accepted by world literature and being valued by the West."⁸⁵

The Chinese literary obsession with a national spirit since the May Fourth movement in the early twentieth century is a result both of a painful memory of over a century's humiliation imposed by the Western countries in the forms of war, territorial concession and monetary loss beginning with the Opium Wars in the mid-19th century, and of a traumatic memory of the horrific 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution that has not only bankrupted the national economy but crushed national/human spirit. The awareness of the Chinese Nation, rather than the habitual thought of the Chinese Empire that governed the world "under heaven" (tian xia) and arrogantly assumed superiority to all "barbarians," has thus always been accompanied by the shame of impotence in the face of foreign invasion or prosperity, frustration over the backward Chinese reality, and burden to shake off the damaging image of "sick man of East Asia." The intimate relationship between literature and nation building can be best illustrated by the famous story of Lu Xun, the greatest modern Chinese writer, who gave up his education in western medicine and picked up the pen, the surgical tool for the mind.

The desire to rise up, compounded by a sense of inferiority, develops a xenophobic Western complex that simultaneously loves and hates the West. In the 1990s, the more developed and mostly one-way globalization (of Western goods and thoughts) further motivates the Chinese to construct a nation of strength and wealth in order to participate at more equal a level in the global cultural and economic exchange. The eagerness to host the Olympics Games and the anticipation to join the WTO demonstrate how seriously China has taken the present globalization as an opportunity to build itself and catch up. Meanwhile, the return of Hong Kong and Macao has certainly fueled up the national spirit.

These circumstances call to the writers to search for “Chinese” roots or to create “real Chinese heroes” to represent “real China” that is promising, confident, democratic, just, powerful, and of course heroic, thus worthy of respect and trust. The desire for greatness and grandness creates “grand literature:” the characters are grand (male with economic and political power, either born with it or later acquired), the narratives are grand (always coincide with the great times and the great issue of economic reform), and even their audience are grand (they are either “the people”—*ren min* or the politically much loaded “mass”—*qun zhong/da zhong*), instead of the more modest and neutral “readers.” Liang Hongying explains this clearly in his “Literature: Tribute to the Great Times,” written on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of Chinese Communist Party. He lists four male writers—Liu Jianwei, Zhou Meisen, Hou Yuxin and Lu Tianming—as

the masses’ favorite writers as a result of their solid, grand and majestic representation of real life. They have profound understanding of the society and a strong sense of mission and responsibility. They disdain to go along the writing style of small emotions and wind, flower, snow, and moon. Their eye and pen always target the most active economic, political and cultural fields in contemporary China, expressing the heartfelt wishes and desires of the maximum majority.⁸⁶

Some people, apparently not “ren min” or “da zhong,” are marginalized, forgotten and silenced, along with their similarly non-grand life experiences, which are necessarily outside the territory of “real China.” The conservative nationalist sentiment is ironically further legitimated by the recently imported post-colonial theories whose emphasis on the unequal power relations between the West and the East contributes to a new wave of demonization of the West as a cultural neocolonizer. I am not arguing that the West is not a cultural neocolonizer in today’s globalization. My problem is that the sole focus on the West as nothing but a cultural neocolonizer has encouraged a neoconservative nationalist

discourse, which overlaps with Maoist literary criticism that censors any voices different from the so-called socialist realistic Chinese reality, which composes of workers, peasants and soldiers.

Of course, not all writers are fond of “grand” narratives, especially the avant-garde writers of the late 1980s and early 1990s whose “extreme subjective imagination and unique, vivid language have deliberately formed a subversive force and deliberately rebel and deconstruct the existent mainstream cultural consciousness and narrative principles.” According to Liu Zaifu, the avant-garde literature deconstructs the capitalized “Human” recently built and concentrates on exposing the dark side of the human nature. More importantly, it deconstructs history. In the imagination of these writers, the familiar national revolutionary history becomes a history of personal sexuality, full of coincidences and absurdity such as in the novels of Su Tong, Mo Yan and Chen Zhongshi. Consequently, it deconstructs “sacred” myths and values established in the past, and at the same time it deconstructs themselves, with “decadence” (Su Tong) and “play” (Wang Shuo).⁸⁷

However, this construction of sexuality, just as heroic characters in grand nationalist narratives, is both nationalistic and masculinist. It attempts to rescue national masculinity from Western aggression. More significantly, it attempts to restore “normality” and true femininity to women empowered by revolutionary nationalist discourses, especially during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and the 1970s. The Maoist revolutionary nationalist discourse is problematic exactly because of the phenomenon that suddenly men and women are absolutely “equal” or the same: they employ the same revolutionary language, they have the same revolutionary clothes and

they all belong to the revolution. If women suffer from deprivation of opportunities to explore femininity, the lack of space for masculine potency is assumed more traumatic for men as it imposes upon men symbolic double castration. For, not only can they not control their own destiny, but also they cannot even demand submission from and provide protection for women. It is this “absolute sexual sameness,” especially the newly established revolutionary tradition that the revolution, not men, owns women, that prompts writers, particularly male writers, to rebuild a strong Nation with strong, often revolutionary, male characters in contrast to supplementary, feminine and sensualized female characters.

It is ironic to see that men cannot be “men” unless women act like “women.” To rescue men, as well as the Nation, from emasculation has been the mission of the post-Cultural Revolution generations. This time period has witnessed literary obsession with male sexuality that had been suppressed, restricted, disciplined, regulated and thus sterilized by the State. To be precise, the urgent mission for the writers is to reverse the “abnormal” phenomenon of “strong women and weak men” (yinsheng yangshuai) and to rebuild or remember male sexual potency, which is meaning only in opposition to a newly defined femininity, different from the asexual, strong and strong-willed, independent, society or nation-oriented, intimidating, castrating, revolutionary woman who was deprived of her “natural” femininity and became a quasi-man. Thus, it is no surprise that *Half of Man is Woman* by Zhang Xianliang tells a story of an impotent man who re-finds his sexual power under the nurturing of a “real feminine”—committed, sexual, self-sacrificing and illiterate—woman, whom in turn is abandoned as soon as the man becomes a “real” man. The imagined male sexuality is powerful, active, confident,

aggressive and defiant while the woman mainly exists to demonstrate her femininity—silence and submissiveness—so as to reinforce and validate the male desire.

In this sense, it is not hard to find that *Shanghai Baby*, a story of a young woman writer searching for the difference that defines her in highly Westernized post-colonial Shanghai is considered illegitimate. One major accusation is that Wei Hui, as well as Coco, the Shanghai baby, is fake. According to Zhang Ning, “In the times of real vs. fake, rather than good vs. evil, being fake is the biggest evil.”

Wei Hui’s fakeness lies in two aspects: not Chinese enough and too Westernized. Zhang Ning’s “Wei Hui: A Lie to WTO” focuses on Wei Hui’s crime of lying throughout the article. She states that Wei Hui represents the nature of Shanghai petite bourgeoisies: “double fakeness of experience and discourse” and that Wei Hui’s story deviates from the truth of Chinese society and even the truth of Wei Hui’s own life.⁸⁸ Ge Hongbing in “Transnational Capital, Middle-class Taste and Current Chinese Literature” also argues that “in *Shanghai Baby*, we can only see bars, parties, the so-called writer who writes in her room while masturbating, various unemployed idle people as well as persons from the other end of the ocean. But we cannot find a single real (shishi zaizai) Chinese.”⁸⁹ The real Chinese happen to be “close to one billion peasants” and “hundreds of millions of blue-collar workers.” Like Zhang Ning, Ge says that the life portrayed in *Shanghai Baby* is not “real” life lived by “real” people. At the same time, he argues that the problem lies in Western cultural infiltration with the help of transnational capital. Ignoring any positive influence of Western culture and literature, Ge believes that imported Western literature and criticism becomes the standard for “New Generation writers” and robs them

of their ability to be Chinese. Therefore, Their works are nothing but imitations of the West. Worried about the future of Chinese literature under the influence of transnational capital, Ge advocates an end to mystifying the West and a return to our own “native” “cultural womb (wenhua muti).”⁹⁰

While it is legitimate for Ge to critique the overwhelming power of Western theories, he is guilty of going to the other extreme. Deconstructing the myth of the West, he has created an equally dangerous myth of China, which is employed for censoring dissenting voices. Wei Hui’s portrayal of Coco is fake just because it is beyond the scope of Ge’s nationalist literary discourse. On the other hand, Zhang Ning connects Wei Hui’s fakeness with “materialistic fetishism and sexual seduction,” supported by a “mental reality” (xinli xianshi) that desires international fashion, in a commercialized and commodified society at the age of capital globalization. Instead of the labels of “alternative” and “the subaltern,” Wei Hui’s discourse is mainstream in China and in the world for its worship of the West and Western Phallus. First, Zhang considers Wei Hui a person with “sexual dysfunction,” evident in Wei Hui’s quotations of Western writers, philosophers, artists and musicians at the beginning of each chapter. These special, “more classic” fillers with “passionate languages, like Viagra, add excitement to Wei Hui’s desire story.” Second, Wei Hui exaggeratedly describes Mark’s sexual potency, even his body odor while Tiantian, the Shanghai youth, becomes a victim of Western Phallus.”⁹¹

Impressive as Zhang Ning’s arguments are, they fail to situate Wei Hui within China’s cultural and political specificities that have long considered sexuality a taboo and self-destructive corruption. As a result, Zhang is limited and also contradictory. On the one hand, she argues that Wei Hui does not represent the truth of China while on the

other she acknowledges Wei Hui's authenticity in representing "Shanghai petite bourgeoisies." In other words, Shanghai, as a representative of China, is shaky, which is shared and confirmed by Ge Hongbing who clearly shows hostility to middle-class urban youth like Wei Hui.

Ge Hongbing and Zhang Ning's construct of Wei Hui as a fake is also a result of male-centeredness of Chinese literary criticism. It betrays an acute sense of anxiety of China as "the sick man of East Asia" as opposed to strong threatening Western nations. Just like China—the sick man of East Asia—could not defend herself against Western military powers, Tian Tian is "a victim of Western Phallus," in Zhang Ning's words. He is impotent and loses Coco to Mark, the virile Western man. Ge Hongbing shows his desire to build nationalistic masculinity when he devalues all of the influential imported Western writers and philosophers. Instead of assessing with reason the role they have played in Chinese culture, he carelessly reduces them to a product of transnational capital.

Even if they [imported Western writers] are not Western writers or not from developed countries, even if they hold a Third World position, most of them are recognized by literary awards and publishers in the West, and also come to China through Western publishers. They not only provide us with experiences to approve the West but also with experiences to disapprove the West. Transnational capital is so confident that it even provides us ways to critique it while providing us ways to compliment it.⁹²

In the name of the Chinese nation, Ge legitimates his "close door" attitude toward Western literature and criticism, which have been popular since Chinese "open door" policy in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He presents similar argument in his two

(ironically) controversial “Elegies”—“An Elegy for Twentieth-century Chinese Literature” and “An Elegy for Twentieth-century Chinese literary criticism.”

Ge advocates a structure or paradigm of Chinese literary criticism, independent of Western thought and free from suppressive authorities. However, his essays show ambivalence of Chinese intellectuals toward political authorities. On the one hand, he pinpoints a depressing reality of modern and contemporary Chinese literature and literary and cultural criticism, whose survival and development have always been part of the political propaganda promoted by and for the authorities.⁹³ In other words, creative and critical freedom and space have always had to be approved and defined directly by political authorities. However, he does not pay attention to the complexity of the power relation between Chinese intellectuals and political authorities. While intellectuals are oppressed by the authorities, Ge seems not to notice a shared belief between the two parties in the enlightening responsibility of the intellectuals, and the shared nationalist sentiment to build a great and glorious China in a new promising century.

Obsessed with building a strong China and completely oblivious of the repressive side of nationalism, little aware are the critics of their own conformity to or even conspiracy with the political authorities in their attack on *Shanghai Baby*. The problem is not just that Wei Hui, along with other new generation writers, employs Western techniques or presents Westernized experiences. The real problem is that Wei Hui and her character Coco choose to stay outside the masculinist nationalist literary discourses. They do not care about the nationalist burden to cure or build a national spirit, nor do they want to sacrifice themselves for the glorious restoration of male sexuality. They are not searching for strong men to serve, but for the purposes of their own lives. Instead of

building the myth of the nation, Wei Hui throws it away like out-of-fashion clothes. As a writer, Wei Hui enrages the authority and the public, particularly intellectuals, with her mockery of the self-assumed heroism of the “national” writer and with her “exciting” formula--sex and violence for example--for the novel.

Despite their rather feeble voice in comparison to the overwhelming anger of negative attack on Wei Hui, a few critics argue that Wei Hui is a Chinese new writer with great potential. Bai Ye, who recommended Wei Hui to the publisher, does not attempt to conceal his appreciation and great expectation of Wei Hui. From her writing style to her subject matter, Bai compliments Wei Hui for her maturity. In contrast to the accusation of Wei Hui being fake, Bai Ye pinpoints Wei Hui’s “difference” (linglei) from other writers: “[Coco] squarely and fairly pursues new and unique life, and pursue new and different love. That passion to forge ahead and courageousness are all the significance and proof of her ‘different’ existence.”⁹⁴ Yang Yang on the other hand states that Wei Hui, along with other post-1970 novelists, “enriches and opens the aesthetic space,” and her works as well as others’ works have been the most powerful emergence of the new novel since the 1980s, which is the morning of the birth of the new novel.” Stating that some critics misunderstand the new writers and their works, Yang Yang argues that these works are “based on reality” (you qi xian shi ji chu) and that the reality is different from the previous generation. As he puts it, “the life experiences represented in their works are beyond the reach of the established writers of the 1980s.” As far as Wei Hui is concerned, Yang Yang puts forward that “Wei Hui’s works demonstrate the coming-of-age mentality of urban young women and complete modern metropolitan atmosphere, which no other Chinese writers could replace.”⁹⁵

The controversy of Wei Hui is therefore a consequence of the inadequacy of male-centered nationalist contemporary Chinese literary criticism. According to Yang Yang, the problem lies in the reluctance of paradigmatic shift on the part of the critics. In other words, literary critics should not restrict themselves to old structure of thought and theory and that new writing requires new critical standards. He states,

In fact, the concern with and evaluation of these new writers and their works in the 1990s was not to simply approve some specific writers and their works, nor to make certain commercial gains. From the perspectives of the novels of the new century and the development of criticism, it is time that we reflected on the aesthetic standards inherited from the 1980s.⁹⁶

As a feminist critic, my goal is not just to challenge the male-centered nationalist discourses of Chinese literary criticism as a whole, but to reshape feminist literary and cultural criticism with deconstruction of nationalist feminism.

The Female Body, Women's Writings and the Death of Nationalist Feminism

The ban of *Shanghai Baby* is not simply a symptom of a serious crisis in Chinese literary and cultural criticism as a whole. The Wei Hui controversy shows an embarrassing and vulnerable situation of Chinese feminism, "protected" and consumed by nationalist discourses. The lack of feminist analyses of Coco's complicated exploration of sexuality, in contrast to the overwhelming negative judgment on Coco and Wei Hui's conducts, embodies the failure of nationalist feminism. Liu Jianmei's research on the repeatedly

used formula “revolution plus love” in twentieth-century Chinese fiction brilliantly illustrates the painful position of nationalist feminism that subordinates women under the umbrella of the “larger” and “nobler” category of the nation.⁹⁷ The female body, unless serving the nationalist cause mostly represented by male revolutionaries, is deemed frivolous and negative. However, it is exactly at the site of the female body and female sexuality that nationalist discourses are destabilized. In the words of Liu, a woman’s “role as a real agent of female revolutionaries was perpetually disrupted and disqualified by her own body.”⁹⁸

The subversive power of female sexuality as opposed to masculinist nationalism is illustrated ironically in the vehement attack on Wei Hui and other post-1970s writers. According to critic Yuan Liangjun, these writers and their works “are nothing but the trash of the Chinese youth and the Chinese nation. If we have too many of these novels, it would be the end of Chinese literature, and it would be the end of China.”⁹⁹ It is small wonder that the official reason for the ban is that Wei Hui’s depiction of sexuality in *Shanghai Baby* is pornographic and excessive and thus harmful to readers, particularly to the youth readers who are still absorbing information in the process of growing up. In this sense, the ban on Wei Hui is an attempt to restore the old order of Nation over women, particularly women’s body. Wei Hui, unable to be contained in conventional nationalistic discourses, has to be punished.

Feminist criticism in China has to envision itself beyond the nationalist framework. While the official ban on *Shanghai Baby* shows a tight nationalist control over women’s bodies, it more importantly confirms the disruptive and subversive power

of female sexuality against nationalist politics. In fact it provides a possible start point for Chinese feminist critics: the female body.

It is exactly on the female body that nationalist feminism loses its focus. As Liu Jianmei points out, the power of the female body is significant, even when the female body is controlled within the masculinist nationalist discourses.¹⁰⁰ This is probably the exact reason the female body has undergone consistent and sometimes extreme manners of erasure, while women as a whole have been offered unprecedented freedom and protection through new laws, new organizations (like ACFW) and education after 1949. From a nearly total erasure of women's bodies before mid-1970s, through the "return" to "true" femininity in the 1980s, to the privatization of women's body experiences since the 1990s, feminism in China has never developed beyond nationalist male gaze and control.

The years between 1949 and 1976 have witnessed the gradual tightening of the control of women's bodies in the state-approved movement of women's liberation. Much research has been done on the relationship between the nationalist revolution and the female body. Critic Meng Yue, for example, focuses on the repressiveness of the Communist revolutionary discourses while Wang Ban points out the uncontrollable bodily disruption of revolutionary politics. Recognizing their insightfulness and limitation, Liu Jianmei emphasizes a balanced perspective that sees both sides of the revolution-body relationship and questions whether gender equality, widely promoted by the authorities, conflicts with official revolutionary discourses.¹⁰¹ In Liu's words, "the emancipated woman is only the reflection of the state political apparatus."¹⁰²

It is undeniable that Chinese women have enjoyed great freedom, in comparison to their bleak slave-like situation in the strict hierarchical structure of feudal families before 1949. However, they are liberated just to be subjugated to a new master, the master of the state. For instance, the 1950 marriage law almost declared an independence of the female body from tyranny of patriarchal family when a great number of women took advantage of it and divorced.¹⁰³ Naturally, the law was later amended to shrink the space and freedom of the female body. Nonetheless, new generations of women could be inspired and empowered by the slogan that “women can hold up half of the sky” and grow up with aspiration for professional success instead of successful housewives; however, the extent of their self-fulfillment has largely depended on the space allocated to them by the revolutionary national authorities, to which they had no choice but to devote themselves.

This limitation of nationalistic feminism is obvious particularly in the “model operas” invented during the 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution. Xi'er in *The White-hair Girl* and Qiong Hua in *The Red Detachment of Women* are first saved and consequently liberated by the Communist Party, and the only way to continue or keep their freedom is to join in the revolution, which they have done and may have gained certain leadership. For example, Qiong Hua becomes the leader of the Detachment after the death of Hong Changqing while Ke Xiang of *Azalea Mountain* is sent as the Party Representative to lead the guerrilla fighters. Other than the revolution, however, they do not have anything to think about. Or rather, they are not allowed to think about anything else, especially sexuality. Romance or love, if ever permitted, is no longer emotional connection but class-based revolutionary reasoning, passionate it may be. Often times the lover (Hong

Changqing in *The Red Detachment of Women*) or the husband (Zhao Xin in *Azalea Mountain*) is conveniently dead, and is usually killed by the enemy. Conveniently, the nationalistic revolution replaces the dead and takes the position of a symbolic lover.

This image of “national woman under a Maoist-communist state inscription” marginalizes gender issues as it simply creates another man.¹⁰⁴ It is repressive in its demand for the absolute purity of the female body. Xi’er, the white-hair girl, has gone through a great deal of change before she is presented as the revolutionary ballet to the Chinese public. In the original script, Xi’er is pregnant with Huang Shiren (the landlord who causes the death of Xi’er’s father). For a while, Xi’er, being the mother of the unborn child, is dreaming to become a concubine for Huang until she overhears Huang saying that she would be killed after the birth of the child. Only then is she completely disillusioned and decides to turn to the revolution. However, in the final version, there is no reference to sexual contact between Xi’er, the oppressed, and Huang, the oppressor, let alone the possibility of a child that complicates their relationship. As a woman who devotes to the revolution, her mind and more importantly her body must be pure from any kind of sexual corruption. In the words of Li Ziyun, women are only “empty vessels of the revolution.”¹⁰⁵

Femininity and women’s return to it have been a central literary and cultural theme starting the early 1980s. *Where Did I Miss You?* (wo zai nail cuoguo le ni) by Zhang Xinxin was the first to tackle the issue of imposed masculinity and repressed femininity.¹⁰⁶ It tells a story of a bus conductor who has been living “like a man” and whose masculine mask costs her the love of her dream.¹⁰⁷ Although the play the female protagonist writes is accepted by a director, with whom she falls in love, her true physical

self is rejected by him. The reason is simple: in his eyes, she is not a woman but is “like a man”: her unattractive masculine, instead of fitted colorful clothes, her coarse instead of soft voice and her aggressive instead of gentle manner. She is the monster Frankenstein, created to be rejected. She realizes that simulating the male sex and sacrificing her female identity have not liberated her but deprived her of the right to love and happiness.

Therefore, she (and the author) concludes that being woman and being different from man is the first step toward sexual equality.

Unfortunately, women’s return to femininity—where they belong—serves men more than women. Contrary to the argument of many critics that feminism has been revived since the 1980s, particularly the 1990s, as a result of benevolent governmental gestures, the space of the female body as well as the development of feminist criticism is still much limited, subjected to a similar nationalistic ideology in which national modernization replaces national revolution. To a degree, the flourishing of writing on the female body and female sexuality since after the Cultural Revolution is due to the fact that it more or less conforms to the ideology of a male-centered nationalistic modernization, whose emphasis on gender difference rather than equality results the legitimization of sexist discrimination in employment and the recent call for women to return home so as to create working space for men and higher efficiency for the nation. The role of women and the nature of nationalist feminism are thus clear.

Although the 1980s has seen a newly awakened consciousness of women’s bodies, it is in the 1990s when “the liberation of the body” and the privatization of the

female body takes place simultaneously. The (female) writer critic Xu Kun brings up the notion of

the third liberation, the liberation of body for women in the 1990s. A relatively equal and progressive social system and the establishment of relatively developed information highway have enabled women to choose more freely their living style without systematic pressure and moral accusation from the public, whether they choose marriage, celibacy or divorce, or whether they decide to work outside or stay at home. Only at this time can the question of 'body' be recognized and the lost gender be revived; therefore, women have strong desire to know their body. They don't have to borrow like before the male lens to see themselves but try to recognize their own body with their own eyes. They look squarely at and rediscover and re-appreciate, with new perspectives, their body, thus rediscovering their lost self.¹⁰⁸

Starting from the mid- and late 1980s, Chinese women writers have turn their attention to representation of female sexuality, such as Wang Anyi, with "Trilogy of Love" (san lian) as well as *Ballad of Everlasting Sorrow* (chang hen ge), and Tie Ning, with "Trilogy" (san duo), *Rose Gate* and *Great Tested Woman* (da yu nu). Their female characters, good or bad, educated or illiterate, no longer wait for men to take them but are active and aggressive in exploring and experimenting sexuality. However, both are not confident of female and/feminist perspectives and both have managed to take an androgynous or "neutral" stand, highly praised by critics. Tie Ning says this explicitly in the preface to *Rose Gate*:

When I am dealing with women as subject matter, I have always been trying to break free from the pure female gaze. I long to acquire an androgynous perspective or a perspective of "the third sex," which will help me grasp more accurately the reality of women's living conditions. In China, it is not that the majority of women have a clear concept of self-liberation. What enslaves and represses the soul of women often is not men but women themselves. When you start to write about women, you have to transcend the natural narcissism caused by gender. Only then can women's true quality and splendor be more reliable so that you can unearth at a deeper level human nature, human desire and human essence.

¹⁰⁹

Since the 1990s a new generation of women writers like Chen Ran and Lin Bai have taken a more radical approach to the female body, especially the female sexuality. They no longer worry about whether they are gender-biased and thus less important, and they consciously choose to see things from a feminist or female perspective. In fact, they do not care whether readers or authorities accept them or not. They are aware of the repressive danger, in the name of authority and power, of the mainstream discourse and culture, and they deliberately take the marginalized position and subject matter. Compared to Wang Anyi, Tie Ning and other women writers of the earlier generation who make conscious efforts to relate gender to nation and society so as to be “un-gendered,” new writers like Chen Ran and Lin Bai are making conscious efforts to separate their experience of the female body from the grand narratives of the Nation in order to foreground gender.

Chen Ran’s *Private Life* (si ren sheng huo) and Lin Bai’s *One Person’s War* (yi ge ren de zhan zheng) are two most significant novels of this trend. Both tell stories of growing up of a young girl into a woman, and deal with sexual awakening, sexual exploration including masturbation, premarital sex, and extramarital relationship, ignoring and deconstructing the grand or personal masculine nationalist reality while creating new, consciously gender-specific, without reference to all the historical national events such as the success of economic reforms or the Communist leadership, all of which require an enthusiasm for collectivism at the cost of the interest of the individual, especially when it concerns the life of a girl.

Against a culture of conformity and collectivism, Chen Ran says in *Private Life*, “I never have interest in any organization. I am individualistic... I think it is a

demonstration of a strong sense of responsibility for a person to bravely stand up and say ‘no’ to the this world.” To her, this determined saying no to the world is a form of destruction of “either the everyday materialistic life or the rigid traditional culture and concept,” a form of destruction “out of which new life and creation begin,” a deconstruction as well as a “construction.” The “personal/ized writing” is thus both personal and public, and “is a progress to creative freedom.”¹¹⁰

This new female body is consciously feminist and political since the authors are not self-censored and pressured by the masculine gaze. It is thus more threatening and consequently encounters more resistance and hostility from the critics, whose conscious and unconscious misinterpretations of feminism and feminist works again side them with the political authorities in their co-optation of the newly revived feminist energy. Commenting on sexism in the field of literary criticism, Chen Ran points out the problem of “gender distance” that contributes biased evaluation on women writers. She states, “As a female author, if you truly insist on the perspectives of the female character and do not cater to the male-centered and male-subjected cultural attitude, you will be discarded aside.”¹¹¹ This is exactly what Xu Kun, in her celebration of the liberation of women’s bodies, does not recognize.

The major way of putting women writers aside is the conventional double standard that domesticate, privatize and sensationalize women’s experiences with their bodies, thus trivializing “body writing” women. In other words, the critics conveniently naturalize and neutralize male experience, which is regarded as the human, the social and the national condition whereas women authors are almost always trapped with the notion of being personal and autobiographical. That is, the female characters in the works of

female authors are often automatically equated with the authors themselves and their own personal experiences while the personal is automatically and absolutely separated from the social or public space. As a result, female authors are necessarily anti-social, narcissistic, narrow, incompetent and most of all, “unreal.” Even feminist critic Dai Jinghua unconsciously contributes to it. On personal/ized writing, she explains that it “approaches history from personal viewpoints and perspectives” and “may dissolve and subvert dominant discourse and mainstream narrative, at least it may form a crack in the whole imagined picture.”¹¹² Then she argues that “for (some) women writers, personal/ized writing is autobiographical. In our current discursive context, it means women writers write personal life and expose personal privacy so as to attack male-dominant society and moral discourses and achieve the world-shocking effect.”¹¹³ It is significant for Dai Jinghua to connect the writing of personal experience with its social impact; however, her argument has been used more often first to fix women writers to “privacy” or the private space and second to equate them with their characters.

Wang Jiren’s “Personalized, Privatized, and Fashionalized: On literature of the 1990s” presents similar explanation. While referring writings by male authors as “personal/ized writing” that “dissolves homogeneous mainstream discourse,” he states that “privatized writing” is usually interchangeable with “female writing,” which is “autobiographical or semi-autobiographical writing” and “self-closed writing, in which the private space is its only space of writing and discourse” with sex taking on a great proportion.¹¹⁴

Along with the sexist critical designation of male and female writers is the unquestioned acceptance of the absolute separation between the public space and the

private space. Oblivious of the fact that “the female being and life experience themselves are part of the social life and [that] the writing of personal experience is thus social representation and ‘voice,’”¹¹⁵ literary critics charge women writers with an inability and incapability of serious exploration of life and limit the female authors to the “absolute personal.”¹¹⁶ Naturally, women writers locked up in the private space can only mean narcissistic and superficial to the literary critics. Dong Xiaoyu’s “The Spiritual Predicaments of Personalized Writing by Women Writers” illustrates very well the limitation of this critical framework. It too depends on the “normalcy” established and maintained by the dominant discourses and separates women from “the mass” and the society. It argues that personalized writing by women writers “distances itself from society, distances itself from the mass, and is trapped in the mud of ‘personal private life’ and ‘personal’ consciousness. It is self-closed with narrow perspectives, hence lacking the profundity of social value, cultural value, moral value and life value.”¹¹⁷ She complains that “[we cannot see in the characters] impression of passionate real life” in the “personal writing” by women writers. She automatically assumes that “personal writing” by women writers are only personal and relevant only to those women writers, instead of considering those writing as social and political representation of women’s reality, which constitutes the bigger reality on the whole. Hence she concludes with “[a] call to women writers to “open the window of their souls, to feel the pulse of the times, to face the living reality of contemporary Chinese; and with their individual soulful experience, to pay close attention to reality, to society, to national affairs, to life and people.”¹¹⁸

The biggest failure of nationalist feminism lies in its lack of theoretical framework on sexuality. Most of the critics simply adopt the officially approved hostility and moral judgment toward sexuality unless it serves some sort of noble spiritual purpose. Consequently, sexual explorations of female characters in women's writing are considered to be predicaments caused by abnormalcy and incompetency of women themselves. Thus feminist expressions on sexuality are pathologized while homosexuality is considered a disease.

Dong Xiaoyu in her negative discussion of women writers, argues that when "a woman is always another woman's god of protection and another woman's hope in life, it is an abnormal emotional belonging. Homosexuality demonstrates a gender displace in human being and must be ridiculous in the eyes of ordinary people." Besides this blatant heterosexism, what is more shocking is her explanation for the existence of such writing, which is the unhappy or unfulfilled heterosexual woman due to the absence of men in her life. Dong points out that

quite a few writers of personalized writing, including Chen Ran and Lin Bai, were raised in a single-parent family. With the help of unfortunate personal marriage, they always convey in their works hatred and disgust toward men and some women writers even declare in their works that "I hate men to death!" This deformed mentality leads these writers to an unbridled advocacy of homosexuality.¹¹⁹

Many critics simply make strict moral judgment, without further explanation. Dong Limin criticizes (female) novelists born the 1970s for their fakeness as a result of financial and aesthetic dependence on the West, sweeping them into the category of abnormalcy. In her words, "Our times consciously and unconsciously tolerate the existence of certain abnormal phenomena: drug-users, underground prostitutes, fooling around with foreigners..."¹²⁰ It is interesting to see that Dong seems to equate inter-

national sexual relationships with prostitution. To be specific, she refers, although implicitly, only to the Chinese-woman-Western-man relationship, demonstrating a blatant masculinist nationalistic discursive control of the female body. Just as homosexual women wander outside male-centered feminization, women in inter-national relationships defy the male-centered nationalist boundaries marked on their bodies. As a result, however serious they may be in their relationships, they cannot be considered heroines of romantic stories but prostitutes who shamelessly sell their bodies to Western customers. What is also interesting is the word “fooling around” or “guihun,” a derogative term used to describe criminals in the past.

It is in this sense that Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baby* is pornographic and sexually excessive. Personal struggle between flesh and soul, as represented in the female body writing, is considered not as profound representation of human complexity but as a lack of “value” in the texts and in the authors. In other words, the critics seem not to mind some description of sex but it has to be the right kind and right amount of sex. Therefore, Dong Xiaoyu compliments “traditional writers” (chuan tong zuo jia) for their depiction of separation of love and sex, which “reflects on self-value and human society.” However, she states that sexual encounters between Mark and Coco “at his residence, at women's restroom and in a car [are] behaviors insulting human dignity and not different from the beasts.”¹²¹ Similarly, Wang Dalou argues that although personalized writing in a sense shows social progress in that individuality is respected and tolerated, it does not mean that you can write anything. Literature should not “deify” (shen hua) characters, nor should it “beastialize” (shou hua) them. That is, “beastialized” characters “can separate as they please ‘sex’ from ‘love;’ they can indulge in endless excessive drinking, lovemaking

and even drugs; they can fully enjoy their parasitical life and in hollow boredom they play games to take up their time; they can surrender to decadence and nihilism, letting them running their course.”¹²²

Similarly for Yuan Liangjun, sex and sexuality “vulgarize” literature and “bestialize” people (ye shou hua), thus needing to be “controlled.” He argues that writing of sexuality is “morbid” instead of “innovative,” and stated that post-1970 writers’ representation of sexual experience “is not at all positive” as a result of being “a copy of [Western] sexual indulgence and sexual degradation.” He then says that “the so-called ‘being crazy’ is nothing but being shameless (bu yao lian).”¹²³ This moralistic attack on Wei Hui is typical. In fact, Liu Jianwei, the “mainstream” writer who writes for “the mass,” comments that Wei Hui and other “beauty writers” are successful for “being bold and shameless (yong gan jia bu yao lian).” Yuan’s hostility toward sexuality is further shown in his equation of a sexual being with “a beast.” To be crazy like Wei Hui, in his words, “is to write in naturalist manner the things that need to be controlled and monitored. The so-called ‘being different’ is to primitivize and bestialize the human, or to change the human to a ‘beast.’”¹²⁴

On the other hand, Hong Zhigang cannot find anything deep in the life experience of a modern women bravely struggling between love and lust, between the materialistic and the spiritual.” Hong concludes that it is a pity to see a loss of value in Wei Hui’s *Shanghai Baby*, which is “sensualized” with “wandering sensibilities” instead of necessary reflections that give literature and its readers a sense of sublimity.¹²⁵ In addition, the automatic equation of Coco with Wei Hui, encouraged by the word “semi-autobiographical” that introduces *Shanghai Baby*, plays even a bigger role in

condemnation in comparison to what has happened to Chen Ran and Lin Bai. Zheng Xiangnan does not recognize the distance between the created and the creator and therefore inappropriately takes whatever is said by Coco as arguments of the author. With the declaration of Coco to exhibit in her books the "original state of life" and "to be an exciting novelist who carefully prepares phrases like omen, conspiracy, infection, dagger, lust, drug, madness and moonlight," Zheng concludes that Wei Hui has a clear and illegitimate purpose for writing. Indifferent to the present moral principles and controversies on the life she represents, Wei Hui is thus guilty of a lack of philosophical thought in her work and of a loss of value for life and aesthetics.¹²⁶

Nationalist feminism is also weak in the face of rising commercial culture that commodifies everything. Instead of complicating the relation between sexuality and the popular culture, literary critics again quickly find the female authors, not the culture in general, guilty of selling female sexuality and privatizing writing. The tension and complex relationship between female sexuality and the commercial culture is certainly an urgent issue for feminists to resolve, and Dai Jinghua illustrates very well her "personal confusion" of the catch-22 situation that female writers are in at the rise of the popular culture:

On the one hand, the female writing different from, unyielding to and not modeling on the male writing is what we have always been expecting; and the close-to-autobiographical female writing that refuses to compromise with the rules of canonical literature is also a way out and a prospect for women's literature. However, within the cultural reality of the 1990s, a much noticeable danger lies in the fact that the bold autobiographical writing of women at the same time is being packaged and revised by the powerful commercial mechanism.... Therefore, a perspective of male gaze has covered the sky and prospect of the female writing.¹²⁷

This confusion or indeterminacy contributes to the fact that some critics regard *Shanghai Baby* feminist or radical feminist while others call it "quasi-feminist" or "anti-feminist." However, what is more "dangerous" is that the male gaze not only comes from the continuous rise of the popular culture but from the critics. Although cultural critics are suspicious or critical of the more and more powerful popular culture, the two parties seemingly hostile towards each other have never become closer. In fact, they reinforce each other with the shared belief that female sexuality exists for one purpose only, which is for sale and profit, in addition to their shared efforts to contain the female body. The only difference is that the commercialized publishers try to contain it in a box of commodity and appropriate any feminist vocabulary into a fashion in order to profit whereas the critics denounce it in an attempt to discipline the female body. Although it is critical for the critics to point out the danger of the male gaze that commodifies the female body and text, most of the critics have unfortunately ignored the complexity of gender and female sexuality. They have blamed only the female authors, and consequently devaluing both the authors and their works. As always, the critics have taken the position of the tongue for the authorities.

The critics find a perfect reason for the female authors' choice of subject matter and their relative commercial success. That is, the female body or sexuality is a hot selling point and as Zhou Xiaoyan puts it, "the popularity of [*Shanghai Baby* and other works by the post-1970 female writers] has nothing to do with literature. They have simply catered to certain social fashion." Thus Wei Hui as well as authors of the body writing are reduced from the status of a literary writer who seeks after aesthetic beauty and produces culture for now and for the future to the position of a businessperson whose

goods happen to be words. Consequently, it is not hard to understand Wang Dalu's argument that Wei Hui is only a "defect" in literature and literary publishing. Disgusted by Wei Hui's fame and the media's attention on Wei Hui's personal life, Wang argues for "normal criticism" that focuses on the works. However, criticisms like Wang's are normal only because they conform certain male-centered nationalist discourses. If we keep in mind the disruptive, although limited, power of the popular culture, it is natural for Wang to disapprove book signing tours that promote commercial success of the authors, but to encourage New-Generation-Writers like Wei Hui to learn to be part of mainstream and be of service to the national cause of reform.

In the Wei Hui controversy, literary and cultural critics have fixed their gaze on the famous line of "using the body to inspect men and using the skin to write" by Mian Mian, another post-1970 female writer, and have applied that line blindly to the post-1970s female writing, particularly to Wei Hui, without understanding the meaning of "body writing" and seriously reading into the text itself. However, the fact is that, in the word of Wei Hui, "I write with my brain while they [some readers] read with their body." Completely oblivious of the responsibilities of the readers including themselves, the critics claim *Shanghai Baby*, a book exploring female sexual dis/pleasure and spiritual un/fulfillment, to be pornographic or sexually excessive. With the endless repetition of the same argument published by established academic journals such as *Literary Review*, *Literary Theory and Criticism*, *The Graduate School Journal of China Academy of Social Science*, *Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art*, and *Academic Quarterly*, *Shanghai Baby* as pornography and Wei Hui as a pornographic writer are finally *produced* and *have become* a reality. The dis-ease, fear and hostility of female sexuality, flooded in the

literary criticism of Wei Hui, if not causing the ban of *Shanghai Baby*, have certainly validated it.

Conclusion

The condemnation of Wei Hui has a lot to do with her distance from and rebellion against the literary tradition dictated by a masculinist nationalism, as previously discussed. The female body is no longer containable by the traditional masculine nationalist discourse. It is powerful, dangerous, seductive and destructive. It is responsible for the death of Tiantian, the boy who could be turned into a man if only the female body is willing to serve and wait, and in turn it must be punished, although not by the author, but by the authorities and the public.

Many critics believe that the Wei Hui phenomenon is abnormal yet transient. Chen Xiaoming observes, “[Wei Hui and other New-New-Generation writers] may not have a revolutionary impact but may change the aesthetic taste and the means of dissemination of traditional literature.”¹²⁸ For feminist critics, the success and ban of Wei Hui’s *Shanghai Baby* should be a critical point to start reconfiguring feminist framework deliberately outside the discursive control of masculinist nationalism. Feminist critics do need to learn the Lu Xun literary spirit, the spirit to critique, rather than conforming to, any type of authoritarianism.

Chapter 3 Li Ang: Sexualizing National Politics

Nothing testifies more vividly and accurately to the intricate relations between feminism and nationalism of Taiwan in the age of global capitalism than Li Ang's Incense Urn Incident (xianglu shijian), the heated controversy concerning Li Ang's 1997 *The Beigang Incense Urn* (*Beigang Xianglu Ren Ren Cha*), a novel that probes the concealed connection between the female body and the nationalist revolution, and recognizes the subversive disruption of female sexuality against the assumed male-centered political self-righteousness. Since its selected publication on *The United*, one of the major newspapers in Taiwan, Li Ang's *Beigang Incense Urn* has aroused passionate responses from people of various backgrounds—literary critics, writers, journalists, politicians, feminists, conservatives, KMTs (Kuomintang, the Nationalist Party who ruled Taiwan until the late 1990s) and DPPs (Democratic Progressive Party, the oppositional party who came to power in the late 1990s). Accusation of insinuation was upgraded to a threat to sue, which only fueled up the market demand. The fields of literature, culture, politics and commerce had never been seen as excited and lively, and “Beigang Incense Urn” as a term has been circulated with legitimacy. Li Ang, the already established controversial female author noted for her bold exploration of the taboo subject of sex, became even more controversial.

This chapter deconstructs the Beigang Incense Urn Incident and the controversy of Li Ang as a female author in contemporary Taiwan literature. It is my argument that Beigang Incense Urn Incident is ultimately a product of reductive literary, cultural and political readings, proscribed by a masculine critical reconstruction of Taiwan literary history in the past few decades, which often exclude women authors from literary and

cultural significance. It reflects the complicated relations between the female body, nationalist politics, the mass media, literary and cultural criticism, and the critical female author. It also betrays an essentially misogynistic discourse of nationalism, democratic or despotic, that is hostile to and intolerant of female sexuality unless it answers to the nationalist interpellation, in the Althusserian sense.

Li Ang's *Beigang Incense Urn* is controversial for the exact reason of its defiance and irreverence of that nationalist interpellation. The female author, Li Ang as well as the recurring character in *Beigang Incense Urn*, exposes the hidden female body appropriated and censored in male-centered "arrogant and absurd political ideals (xuwang kexiao de zhengzhi lixiang),¹" shattering the myth of a feminist and nationalist alliance and producing a different and dangerously sexualized national history. The consequent scandalization of Li Ang and her book eventually confirms an irreconcilable break between feminism and nationalism. However, conflicted criticisms among feminists only show that feminism is no longer a term that automatically unifies different women and feminists.

The Beigang Incense Urn Incident also embodies an awkward relation between feminism and the voyeuristic commercial mass media, particularly on the issue of female sexuality. While major newspapers provide spaces of publication and discussion of female sexuality, they never hesitate to profit from the female body by trivializing it and becoming part of the nationalist policing of the female body.

The Beigang Incense Urn is a book consisted of four related independent novellas exploring the unsaid or silenced stories of women caught in oppositional political

movements in Taiwan. Each story features one or more political women who are willing to dedicated their lives and bodies for political ideals of their own or of their dead or imprisoned husbands. They are highly respected with great political power, which paradoxically turns them into powerless political symbols and puppets, with no right to be a complete woman of their own will. The first story, “The Devil with Chastity Belt” depicts a wife of an imprisoned oppositional representative. Leaving her career as a musical teacher and the comfort of her home, she continues the political struggle of her husband, out of grief and sadness. As a result, she is respected as the new leader for the oppositional party and is known as “the Grieving Mother of the Nation.” Although she has developed romantic feelings with her long-time assistant, she has to be what she is expected to be: the faithful widow of a living husband and the forever “Grieving Mother of the Nation” without any emotional and sexual desires other than those concerning the revolution of nation-building. “The Empty Mourning Temple” that follows compares extremely different treatments of two widows, both of whose husbands involved in oppositional movements and died of (self-) burning. The widow of the self burnt “founding father of Taiwan” is worshiped: she is given power, money, and respect. On the other hand, the other widow, Lin Yuzhen, is told that the death of her obviously politically insignificant husband is considered an accident, thus not nearly as important as the death of “the founding father of Taiwan.” Consequently, Lin’s life and suffering is insignificant. The only thing they share is the political sentiment that demands their sexual loyalty to their dead husbands.

The most controversial “Beigang Incense Urn” is the third piece that presents the personal and political journey of Lin Lizhi, who offers her body to oppositional struggles,

obtained enormous political power as an elected representative, but eventually was considered a “slut,” being gossiped about and evaded within the oppositional party. The last story “Bloody Sacrifice” creates a well-respected Mother Wang whose uncle and husband are both victims of authoritarian government. Unlike other women who constantly struggle within themselves against the “devil” of sexuality, Mother Wang completely devotes herself to the movement. However, she has to deal with this thorny issue when she is doing the final hospice work on her gay son who dies of AIDS.

What connects all of these stories is not just the theme of oppositional struggles and women’s sexuality, but the female author who not only appears in but also creates all four stories, producing a different political reality. The reoccurring character of the female author could be interpreted as Li Ang’s double, which has been created again and again in many of her other works. In a sense, it is one of the ways Li Ang as an author participates in the cultural production and reproduction of her and her controversy.

Li Ang as a controversial writer has been made and revised again and again. Like Wei Hui and Maxine Hong Kingston, Li Ang has also actively participated in the process of self-production as a woman writer. Besides revealing an oppositional (awkward, at best) relationship between feminism and nationalism, the Incense Urn Incident is also highly commercialized. It is understandable for critics to be concerned about disabling impacts that a sweeping force of capitalist commercial market might have on the production of literary works from its survival to development to its circulation. However, instead of simplifying the intricate relationship and interaction between Li Ang, Li Ang’s books, sexual politics, national politics, mainstream media and public voyeurism, I argue that it is the contradiction that on the one hand makes Li Ang and her books so intriguing

and significant and on the other called upon our attention to the influential role played by literary and cultural criticisms in the making of literature, literary history, culture and knowledge.

The Incense Urn Incident: Taiwan Literature, Mainstream Media and the “War between (Two) Women”

If the year of 2000 was the Year of Wei Hui, Li Ang definitely spiced up news headlines in 1997 with “Incense Urn Incident.” For four days since July 23, 1997, *The United*, one of Taiwan’s most influential newspapers, published excerpts of Li Ang’s *Beigang Incense Urn* (*Beigang xianglu ren ren cha*). Immediately Li Ang was accused of insinuating and slandering Chen Wenqian, a powerful female politician and rising star of the DPP at the time. The accusation launched heated debates and discussions about the book, about the back-and-forth responses from different concerned parties, and most of all, about the personal lives of the author and the female politician. Very soon, it was developed into “a war between two women” over a man. According to various sources including Chen Wenqian, Li Ang wrote the novel to avenge for the humiliation she suffered as a result of her lover Shi Mingde leaving her for Chen although Li Ang denied that her story was based on Chen Wenqian and simply put that she was writing a political fiction of a female representative.

For the next month and a half, *China Times*, another most influential newspaper, had published, besides news, articles by well-known authors and critics on this “Incense Urn Incident” almost every day or every other day. While Chen Wenqian threatened to sue Li Ang if the whole novel was to be on the market, the Rye Field Publishing

Company took it as a perfect business opportunity and published the book in advance on September 15 instead of its scheduled end-of-year date. What happened next was similar to Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baby*. Under the intense excitement of a "true story," a threat of a lawsuit, and an ongoing juicy catfights or "war between two women," the book sold over 100,000 copies within a month and was the No. 1 best-seller for New Book (Literature) in September according to Jin Shi Tang, the largest bookstore in Taiwan. Similarly, it was extremely popular at Newsstands, book/magazine booths and convenience stores.

Different geopolitical locations produced different fates for different books and authors: *Beigang Incense Urn* was never banned. Unlike the deliberate silence following the government-intervened ban against *Shanghai Baby*, the aftermath of "the Incense Urn Incident" is quite normal in the sense that the noises and voices are still being heard. In fact, the novel has been adapted into a TV soap opera series, with the author very much involved in the process of production from casting to screenplay writing.

The Incense Urn Incident is a perfect example of the ambivalent relationship between capitalism, mass media, Taiwan literature and women authors. On the one hand, mass media, particularly mainstream newspapers with their literary supplements or *fukan*, have had a tradition of sponsoring literary events and a long history of providing space of publications for new and established writers, especially women writers.² On the other hand, commercial society has more and more packaged sex and politics as profitable commodities and competitive selling points that sensationalize women's disagreements as the "war between women" while reducing women to their appearances.³

The Incense Urn Incident revived the close relationship between literature and mass media, severed by market economy as a result of the loosening political atmosphere and newly established democratic capitalist economy.⁴ Chinese mainstream newspapers have always maintained a close bond with literary development. Often literary magazines or *fukan*, as part of the newspapers, have provided critical spaces for the publications of not only criticisms but original fictions and stories. While independent literary journals and magazines took over the role of mainstream newspapers in Mainland, newspapers in Taiwan kept that tradition very much alive. Many authors started their career with publishing their works in *fukan* or winning literary awards sponsored by the newspapers. *China Times* and *United*, two of the most influential mainstream newspapers, have their well-established annual literary awards for all different genres, with increasing prize money each year. Since the lift of Marshall law in the late 1980, these literary awards have been open to Chinese writing participants from Taiwan, Mainland, Hong Kong, Malaysia, United States and other parts of the world, although those who are more Taiwan-focused rather than China-focused complain about the fact that non-Taiwanese authors sometimes won those awards, particularly grand prizes.

The mainstream media has played a significant role in establishing Li Ang as a capable writer. Li Ang published her first short story “The Flower Season” (*huaji*) on *China Times* in 1968, which later published her other stories such as “In the World,” “The Wedding,” and “The Unsent Love Letter,” making herself known to the public as a rising young writer who shocks her readers with taboo subjects such as youth sexuality, premarital sex and extramarital affairs, which were rarely explored by other writers. Although these subjects are rather common nowadays, they were explosive in the 1960s

when Guo Lianghui's *Lock of Heart* (*xin suo*) was banned for its touch on incest.⁵ In 1984 her status as a talented writer was solidified when *The Butcher's Wife* (*shafu*) won the famous *United Daily* literary grand prize in fiction. Not only was Li Ang famous, but she had established herself as a pioneer feminist author respected and cheered by feminist literary and cultural critics. It was also on *United* that Li Ang's *Beigang Incense Urn* was first published, which caused the sensational Incense Urn Incident. The incident did not lead to a ban but created a shocking sale record when the book hit the market in September, instead of its original scheduled due date in December that year.

Not only did the Incense Urn Incident promoted the sale of the book, it also rescued *fukan* from the edge of bankruptcy. The rough journey of *fukan* was similar to literary magazines published in Mainland. Despite efforts to keep the tradition, the market for *fukan* in Taiwan by the mid-1990s was bleak. Some were cancelled while others shifted their focus from literature to pop culture in order to attract audiences. However, those who changed their literary focus to popular culture did not profit. Rather, they lost their older customers, which prompted these *fukan* to go back to literature. In the middle of all these shifting and transformations, Li Ang's *Beigang Incense Urn* was published in the *fukan* of *United Daily*, radically changing the deadlock situation *fukan* was in. The subsequent series of events contributed greatly to a "renaissance" of *fukan* with literary focus. The trend of *fukan* cancellation stopped and some even made profits for the first time in a long time.

At the same time, the mainstream media habitually reduced the controversy of *Beigang Incense Urn* to a cliché of catfight: a war between two women vying for the love

of the same man. Instead of investigating the profound political and social implications of female sexuality, the media created or catered to a public voyeuristic desire for the personal and private. It is interesting to note the pervasive power of capitalist market economy that produced similar interpretations of difference involving women under different regimes. Like the Mainland media turned on by rifts between Wei Hui and Mian Mian, newspapers and magazines in Taiwan spent much space digging into the past of both Li Ang and Chen Wenqian, comparing details between the fictional characters and Chen.⁶

The media production of “the war between two women” (liangge nuren de zhanzheng) on Li Ang and Chen Wenqian is only rather habitual. In “The Media Representation of Female Politicians,” Ni Yanyuan argues that mass media in Taiwan is blatantly sexist in their different reports on male and female politicians. While male politicians are noted for their talents and abilities, female politicians are monitored and judged by their body: look, fashion and their devotion to their families and children. A divorce female representative is questioned about her ability to govern the nation since she has apparently failed to manage her family, even though the divorce resulted from extramarital affairs of the husband. Pretty female representatives are paid attention to and welcomed while plain politicians are ridiculed, including Lu Xiulian, the Vice President, who was once compared to the Hunchback of the Notre Dame. Chen Wenqian of the Incense Urn Incident once created a “Chen Wenqian Storm,” not for her political achievements but her sexy fashionable dresses and colorful nails.

In their reduction of powerful women to bodies under the male gaze, mass media, Ni Yanyuan asserts, trivialize disagreements of female politicians to “war between

women.” Instead of focusing on the differences of female politicians on issues, ideologies and policies, the media often dramatize the debates and disagreements as “wars between women,” and anticipate as such. Ni gives an example of the media representation of Chen Wenqian and Lu Xiulian in the chairperson race of DPP. About the news that Chen Wenqian announced to join the race, *Central Daily* interpreted it as “a war between two women:”

In the election battle for the DPP chairman, “the war between two women” declared its beginning. Candidate Chen Wenqian, former Director of Culture and Communication, made an announcement yesterday, hinting that the other female candidate Lu Xiulian, Mayor of Taoyuan, was a “flower vase.”

This was published on April 27, 1998. Yet when the election debate on May 9, 1998 actually happened not as anticipated, *Central Daily* seemed to be disappointed and surprised, although it continued to use the term of “a war between two women:”

In the election battle for the next chairman of DPP, Chen Wenqian and Lu Xiulian who were considered the main characters in “the war between two women” by outsiders, unexpectedly, did not have a smell of gunpowder of frontal crossfire at the election debates yesterday. Instead, most of the time was spent on Party reform.⁷

Turning female politicians’ intelligent questioning of policies into dramas of staged catfights to entertain their audience, the media certainly profit from their practice of sensationalism. Seen in this light, “the war between two women” of Li Ang and Chen Wenqian is rather expected. Thus the complicated relations between female sexuality and nationalist politics became a perfect love triangle with perfect selling points: sex, politics and scandals.

To be sure, it is not a simple love triangle, which would have been sensational as well. It is a love triangle involving three in/famous figures. Both Li Ang and Chen Wenqian have already been controversial and well-known in and beyond their own fields.

Interestingly both have become in/famous as a result of challenging traditional taboo of sexuality: Li Ang as an author has for decades tested her readers' limits with the often detailed depiction of women's sexual desires and the interplay between sexuality, violence, capitalism and politics. On the other hand, Chen Wenqian has transformed the unisex image of political women and employed and exposed her femininity to her advantage, and her lively style to a degree has successfully replaced the traditional image of a "grieving" DPP. She not only dares to show her sexy figure with fashionable dresses but also dares to be smart and sharp. For example, when accused by the Nationalist Party candidate of not wearing a bra and thus "indecent" and unworthy of the position as a representative, she simply replied with a humorous yet sharp counterattack. She told the public that the Nationalist Party candidate could do a better job as a salesman of lingerie than as a representative, although she reassured people that she did wear her bra. While the media loved to have a sexy female politician, Chen utilized media to promote herself and the oppositional party. Her style of campaigning proved to be successful for the oppositional party, which earned her the title of "Founding Siren of the Nation" (jianguo yaoji). On the other hand, the man involved is no other than Shi Mingde, former chairman of DPP, who has been imprisoned several times and for whom Li Ang has written a biography on his everyday details while she had a relationship with him. Shi Mingde was also the Chairman of DPP, with whom Chen Wenqian worked as Director of Culture and Communication. Two powerful, controversial, attractive, single women, plus one powerful divorced man—sex, politics and literature: who wouldn't be fascinated? It was the perfect ingredients for media sensation and the voyeuristic public.

In addition to making headlines and “stories” in different newspapers and magazines, Li Ang has also grabbed attention from various critics and is loudly present in “*Taiwan Literary Annual, 1997*.” Except that the category “Lists” provides a list of literary organizations, of teaching and research groups in academia, of courses on modern literature, of literary conferences, of literary awards, of publishing houses, and of media, Li Ang has made into all other four categories. In the “general” section, Li Ang and the “Incense Urn Incident” is the first “big” event mentioned by critic Lu Zhenghui in his article “Literary Writing and Activities” that summarizes the general trends and conditions of Taiwanese literature in 1997, while Xiang Yang’s “Observations on Dissemination and Distribution of Taiwanese Literature” explores the close relationship between literature and media, understandably including Li Ang’s *Beigang Incense Urn*, which was first published by newspapers and was later promoted to be one of the best-sellers by the huge media coverage of the stories behind the stories. Li Ang is also in the section “Events” and the controversy around her newly published *Beigang Incense Urn* is selected as one of the “Ten Literary Events,” among which are the Conference on Literary Magazines of Chinese Newspapers in the World, the establishment of the department of Taiwanese literature at one university, the publication of “Taiwanese Literary Yearbook, 1996,” to name but a few. Li Ang is also thought as one of the “Ten Literary Persons” and her book is one of the “Ten Literary Works.”

Li Ang’s *Beigang Incense Urn* is significant for Taiwanese literature as it excites and expands the dwindling literary market while reviving the almost bankrupted literary magazines sponsored by various newspapers. Lin Jiping in her “Ten Literary Events”

says that the “Incense Urn Incident” is provocative in that it “has generated discussions covering a vast variety of issues:”

Taking it as a news event, people were curious whether insinuation was true or not; Seeing it from literary perspectives, the author and readers were tested on how to interpret literary fictionalization and reality; and reflecting through feminist lens, we had to seriously think about how women should perform on the stage of sexuality, politics and power.⁸

To a certain degree, this was exactly what had happened. While the mainstream media devoted large spaces to cover this newsworthy incident, literary and cultural critics tried to make sense of the whole production of this incident in their own terms, analyzing the interplay between literature and media, art and capitalism, sexuality and national identity, and gender and literary history. Some were fascinated by its social and political impacts yet lamented that the book was popular not for its aesthetic values, some demonstrated contradictions and ambivalence in Li Ang’s position on gender and sexuality, art and capitalist commercial industry, and some tried to defend Li Ang for the long-absent feminist critical voice in dealing with oppositional struggles despite political incorrectness.

Although it is undeniable that mainstream media has helped writers in their search for a writing career, it is also important that we remember that mainstream media were heavily influenced by capitalist market economy that emphasized nothing than those that sell. Like side dishes, media gossips about the three figures made reading of the book even more satisfying. So readers found that the former chairman was keeping low profile, saying that the whole incident had nothing to do with him. Then reports said that Chen Wenqian put Li Ang’s breasts for sale in support of charity: Chen signed her name on the chest position of Li Ang’s picture on the cover of *Beigang Incense Urn*, and she gained

\$100,000 NT for charity with just 8 books. It was truly an “amazing drama,” (hao xi) in the words of the famous critic David Der-wei Wang.⁹ “This amazing drama” made him both happy and worried:

It makes me happy since the literary market has long been bleak. Such a novel (published in excerpts) could expose the reading approach of the “Founding Siren of the Nation,” causing sensation among people who couldn’t wait to spread the word. It seems that the charisma—and damaging power—of words have been proved again. What worries me is the fact that the two involving parties and the group of interested people spend much on the two extremes of “pure fiction” and “real people,” later to be pushed further by the sound and color of the media. How the novel was written is not explored. Whether the writer and the politician are disciples of traditional realism or showmen of postmodern “spectacle” aesthetics and politics is worthy of serious consideration. However, amid the noises and voices, these literary issues have been ignored.¹⁰

Insinuation, Reading and Literary Criticism

The center of Incense Urn controversy is the issue of insinuation, that is, whether Li Ang’s story is based on the life of Chen Wenqian. However, what is neglected is the fact that insinuation, true or not, is simple one of the many ways of literary interpretation. It is far more important to recognize that the pros and cons in this controversy have demonstrated different approaches to Li Ang’s *Beigang Incense Urn* than to determine whether Li Ang is “really” using her character to insinuate against Chen Wenqian. Whatever meanings Li Ang intends the book to be is as relevant as that her intention offers one, of the many, possible understanding of the novel. Literary criticisms on Li Ang have shaped and will continue to shape her voice or messages, although like other critics, Li Ang could participate and has actively participated in the cultural production of the meanings of her stories.

The Incense Urn Incident becomes such a big deal for the simple reason that people have thought of insinuation as *the* only way of interpreting *Beigang Incense Urn* while the truth is that insinuation is one way of reading literature. Both David Der-wei Wang and Zhang Dachun point out the significance of interplay between the author, the readers and the insinuating fiction. According to David Wang, “Insinuating fiction strongly demands interactions between the writer, the work and the reader.”¹¹ The author utilizes real events and conventional realism to construct a “pure fiction” while sending out the message of “reality.” On the other hand, the reader including the insinuated has his/her expectation of the real events, which enables and motivates him/her to search for the “real” things. Wang concludes that “the author and the reader are conspired to play the mind tricks and neither of them is innocent.”¹² He believes that Li Ang is guilty of being a “showman,” which has much to do with commercialization. In addition, he suspects that Li Ang intends the novel to insinuate since she has not directed readers’ attention to any feminist reading of it. All Li Ang did was defend her right and freedom as a writer to write about anything, including the much thorny political fiction that was beyond the reach of writers under authoritarian dictatorship.

Incidentally, Zhang Dachun argues that Li Ang should not be surprised at strong reactions to her novels in Taiwan. Zhang states that writers could take whatever they like as their materials and this freedom is beyond the control of morals and laws. However, it is the overall reading culture that should be the force to “check and balance” writers’ seemingly unlimited power. That is, if writers publish some works commenting on somebody or something, a low-level reading culture would only consider it as complaints or insinuations whereas a more mature reading culture would approach the works from

aesthetic perspectives, thus avoiding the pitfall of voyeurism. Zhang asserts that Li Ang caters to the media and readers' voyeuristic desire although she is acute enough to be aware of the lack of mature reading culture in Taiwan. As a result, Li Ang has not only hurt Chen Wenqian; more importantly, she has damaged the social position of novel and reduced it to the level of gossip with no lasting value.¹³

Unlike David Wang who holds that all literature could be considered more or less insinuation,¹⁴ Zhang considers insinuation as a way of writing and reading to be avoided. Insinuation in writing is "superficial" since it simply focuses on what is happening at the surface without digging deep into the roots of the problems. On the other hand, reading insinuation into a literary work, with its claim of truth or reality, stifles possibilities for readers to discover and create different meanings and significance of the work.¹⁵

To further Zhang's argument, insinuation is legitimate only if it is regarded as no more than one way of reading and one meaning of the text. The author's intention of insinuation is rather insignificant, and it serves nothing but to confirm one particular approach to literary interpretation. Thus, the debate on whether Li Ang intends her novel to insinuate Chen Wenqian should not be all that important. The problem does not lie in her intention but in the discourse of insinuation that privileges this individual reading as the only meaning of the novel while profiting from it. In this sense, both Li Ang and Chen Wenqian have actively participated in the construction of textual meaning of the novel as insinuation since both are not able to view the novel—a piece of literary work—as something beyond the tangled web of insinuation. Paradoxically, their denials have tickled the readers more with the urge to pay attention to details so as to match the fictional characters and the real figures. On the one hand, Chen Wenqian accuses Li Ang

of revenge in the form of distortion and demonization of her political power while denying that she was the main character who used her body and sex to gain political power. On the other hand, Li Ang emphasizes her freedom as a writer to write political fiction about a female representative in Taiwan and compared her novel to “Evita” that also portrays a woman involved in the exchange of sex and power. This analogy might work for her argument of creative freedom but mostly threw her denial of insinuation into trashcan. Meanwhile, the story was being adapted to a TV series, and reports say that Li Ang was actively involved in casting and in fact were searching for an actress and a couple of key actors based on a few real political figures, including Chen Wenqian. This seems to declare that the novel is indeed an insinuation.

As Li Ang has spent much time on denial, her inability to transcend the discourse of insinuation has produced exactly what Li Ang has denied: reducing her literary creation to mere entertaining gossips that discourage more productive ways of reading her novel. As a result, Li Ang has not only satisfied masculine imagination that has always treated women as sex objects, she has also angered many women and feminists. In fact, she was first attacked by women in the DPP, including Chen Wenqian who believed that she should, as a feminist, be able to stand up for herself when being put down. Some critics assert that the novel is a backlash on feminism although Li Ang explains that her novel simply uncovers the complicated corrupted exchange system of power and sex within the oppositional party. Li Ang is charged with overshadowing powerful political women in the traditional misogynistic male gaze that reduces women to exploitable bodies. In “Incense Urn Culture: Opposition to Women in Politics,” Lin Fangmei criticizes Li Ang for encouraging the public to equate women’s political power with their

body, thus viewing women of power as conniving frivolous things instead of talented and hardworking human beings. Therefore, Li Ang is guilty of using a double standard to put women down instead of supporting them. It is interesting to see how the image of Li Ang is transformed in the eye of critics from the woman author who challenges social taboo to someone who conforms to patriarchal rules. Lin Fangmei's critique is certainly legitimate considering the whole reaction to the novel, yet it is also limited by the public insinuating reading. In other words, Lin Fangmei's critique is a reaction to the readers' reactions to Li Ang's writing, instead of reading beyond them.

The focus on *Beigang Incense Urn* as a scandalous insinuation, rather than a serious critique of nationalist politics, betrays a practice of fundamentally masculine literary criticism that trivializes the significance of gender and sexuality while habitually punishing, with ridicule, oblivion and moral judgment, female authors who bring these issues up.

The Female Author against Interpellation: Gender, Sexuality, and Literary History of Taiwan

Li Ang is a female author who refuses to be interpellated by masculinist nationalist ideology. Interpellation is an important concept in Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," which argues that interpellation or hailing turns individuals into subjects with certain identities. However, Althusser is rather pessimistic to state that "individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects."¹⁶ It might be true that "the one hailed always recognizes that it is really him who is being

hailed,”¹⁷ but the individual being hailed can answer that he or she is interpellated by mistake and thus deny the identity of an intended subject.

As far as Li Ang is concerned, feminist critiques in her early works dealing with youth sexuality, extra-marital affairs and sexual violence clearly have made her a challenger of mainstream male-centered Taiwanese literary and moral tradition, dictated by a repressive KMT government. Secondly, feminist perspectives on the increasingly powerful oppositional political struggles have pitted her against her former oppositional allies. If her earlier exposure of social and sexual injustice situates her side by side with oppositional struggles, she has not allowed herself to be limited by them. As a female author, Li Ang has constantly questioned and probed what is behind or beneath the glamour of political concepts and movements. At the same time, she has over the years created in her writing “a female author” who questions that nationalist interpellation. In the midst of discursive and ideological clashes, the female author, Li Ang as well as her fictional alter ego, comes into being.

The female author encounters and rejects nationalist interpellation, although not without some struggling. In an interview with feminist critic Qiu Kuifen (Chiu Kuei-fen), Li describes her ambivalence toward the nation she loves as well as her determination to fight the temptation of its call to silence her critical voice. She says,

My novel [*The Devil with Chastity Belt*] ironically challenged Taiwan History and nativist identification... But while writing I find that the biggest problem right now is that I identify with Taiwan, but my novel could not present gloriously and correctly the history of Taiwan, which made me ashamed to be a Taiwanese. However, as a writer, I think it is not my job to write the correct and glorious side of Taiwanese history. It is in here that lies my biggest crisis. At present my identification with “woman” is probably fighting against my identification with “nation” as well as with “history.” If the history of family or nation is to be written honestly from a female point of

view, I am certain that there will be writings like what I am writing now. Yet I am also certain that this will be criticized by those who love Taiwan. Therefore, I see these two things fighting in my novel, and what wins later is the woman part, for I believe that that is what lasts.¹⁸

Instead of a self-censored writer answering the call of the nation, the female author sexualizes, even scandalizes, the nation. Noted for her explicit description and bold exploration of the taboo subject of sex and sexuality, Li Ang had shocked her readers so much so that the critics did not quite know how to deal with her until the introduction of Western feminism in the early 1980s. Feminist theories have provided literary critics much needed vocabulary to approach Li Ang and granted Li Ang legitimacy in the literary space, critical to a young female author, especially when the subject matter was considered a taboo. On the other hand, feminism has heavily influenced Li Ang's writing, giving her works more force and clarity in tackling social and political problems. In a word, feminism, against nationalism, has interpellated Li Ang into a legitimate female author.

Beigang Incense Urn continues Li Ang's own literary tradition of sexuality, established since the publication of her first story "The Flower Season (huaji)" in 1968. At the age of seventeen and as a high school student, Li Ang shocked her readers with bold presentation of sexual fantasies of a high school girl about an old gardener on a sunny winter day when she plays truant. The story stirred up the society in which sex (outside marriage) was not only forbidden but immoral and sometimes criminal. How could an innocent young schoolgirl have "dirty" thought? But that was just the beginning. Throughout the years Li Ang has tackled almost all aspects of sex from premarital sex among college lovers in "In the World" (Renjian shi) to extra-marital affairs in "An

Unsent Love Letter” (Yifeng weiji de qingshu), from marital and sexual violence in *The Butcher’s Wife* (*Shafu*) to sexual decadence in *The Labyrinthine Garden* (*Miyuan*).

Although critics could trace the influence of modernism in her early works, many could not figure out how to deal with her treatment of the sex taboo.

As many critics noted, sex was the one theme that connected almost all of Li Ang’s works. Often in Li Ang’s works, sex is not romanticized but is seen absurd, dry and as a tool with exchange value. Sexual encounter in “In the World” might have something to do with love, but what happens afterwards simply makes readers speechless. As a result of utter ignorance and innocence, the heroine tells her friends and her teacher about it. As a consequence of tasting the forbidden fruits and thus being immoral, both she and her boyfriend are expelled from the university, for which they have studied so hard in order to get out of their impoverished living environments in the countryside. In “Fake Mask” (*jiamian*), an exciting extra-marital affair has different meanings for the female and male characters involved. When the woman is ready to leave her husband and child behind to pursue her love, she learns that his commitment is only limited to the fact that he is not seeing any other woman while dealing with her. When their chance of seeing each other decreases, she finds that “the only place I could see you was in that bed and what you wanted was always that thing (sex).” Not able to leave neither her husband nor her lover, she says:

I felt that I had nothing, although I was taking two different men in two different beds.

I didn’t know what my family and my over ten years of marriage had left me except the house, the car, money and a son. And you, my lover, I didn’t know what you had given me except that bed and your (sexual) skills.

All that I had was humiliation. In order to maintain a family, I fulfilled the obligation of a wife. Then I went to my lover and asked for love and real

satisfaction. Yet I had to ask myself, what kind of love enabled you not to mind the fact that I had sex with my husband? Of course I admitted that I felt satisfied, particularly after comparison. However, when I lay down in the arms of either one of you, I truly felt that I was even less than a prostitute.¹⁹

Li Ang then explores the issue of extra-marital affairs further in her sensational *Dark Night*, in which sex and money are exchangeable. Family, friendship and love all lose their meanings in the face of money. Yu, a journalist, sleeps with the wife of his best friend, Huang, who in turn gets insider trading information from Yu on the stock market and makes money out of it. On the other hand, Chen, in the name of moral purification, uses this information to force Huang to choose between a husband who exchanges his wife's body for money and a bankrupted businessman who loses both his wife and his friend. The darkness in the business industry was so shocking that the News Bureau threatened to ban the novel until Li Ang omitted a few "dirty" words.²⁰

Yet no writing shows more poignant an attack on repressive male-centered tradition than in *The Butcher's Wife*. No doubt the new wave of feminism has played a role in winning the *United Daily* grand prize for her novella, in which sexual violence is pervasive in the form of rape, exchange (for food), marital rape and gossip. Inspired by a piece of news published in a newspaper about a wife killing her husband, Li Ang creates a tale of a tragic young woman who is sold by her relatives to a butcher and is beaten, raped and starved until she kills him. The original story interests Li Ang in that it is not a tale of adultery wife but that of an unfortunate woman oppressed by social tradition. The story reported that Zhan Zhou Shi was constantly beaten by her alcoholic husband, a butcher. He also tied her to a bench and forced her to watch him kill pigs. In the end she could not take it any more and killed her husband the way he killed the pigs. The reporter

acknowledged that Zhan Zhou Shi had mental illness but asked not to be lenient with her since “killing one’s husband was a social and moral issue.”²¹

Li Ang’s story on the other hand provides detailed descriptions of a victim violated by the patriarchal society—her relatives, her husband, and her neighbors. First, Lin Shi is betrayed by her uncles, who have cheated land and house from her and her mother after her father’s death. Out of hunger, her mother has had sex with a soldier in exchange for some food. Lin Shi not only witnesses this but also public humiliation of her mother being tied to a pole waiting to be drowned—her punishment for adultery. This tragedy makes Lin Shi have nightmares symbolic of sexual violence: a tall pole penetrating darkness burnt into pieces by thunder while blood oozes out of pieces of the pole. As Chen Yuling notes, this dream represents Lin Shi’s enlightenment to sexuality, “blood (menstruation), sex and death (mother’s death as a result of adultery), shame (public humiliation of mother).” It is a prediction of Lin Shi’s violent marriage.²²

Later Lin Shi is married off (or sold) to the butcher, Chen Jiangshui. All that Lin Shi knew about sex is pain and screaming, which gives Chen satisfaction and earns herself enough food for a meal. The close link between sex and food, demonstrated by her mother, is reinforced, particularly when Chen starts to starve Lin Shi for her refusal to scream. For Chen, Lin Shi is no different from the pigs he slaughters everyday:

When the sharp knife was pulled out and blood was splashed out, [Chen] felt a supreme hearty satisfaction. Just like a hot stream flowing within his body turned, at a high forceful speed, into white thick liquid spraying into the deepest part of women’s darkness. To Chen Jiangshui, the flying blood and sperms had almost the same pleasure.²³

Although Lin Shi tries to raise some ducks in order to survive on her own, her hope is cut short when her little ducks are chopped dead by Chen.

Seeing too much violent animal killing and enduring too much mistreatment, Lin Shi takes her fate in her own hand, although rather unconsciously. Throughout the killing, she seems to be in a trance and thinks that she is dreaming. Li Ang's story ends in the controversial climax of detailed husband killing, in which Chen appears as the face of the soldier who has had sex with her mother, and the pigs in the slaughterhouse. The forceful flow of blood from Chen's throat is like a bloody-turned-black pole penetrating the darkness, and Lin Shi's knife continues to chop at the belly, the intestines, the feet and the rest of the body.

Despite the charge that her novella could corrupt the mind of youth readers with detailed descriptions of sexual violence and the last scene of killing, feminist critics have raved over it for its grim depiction of the bleak situation of women as victims under the control of patriarchy. Husband killing becomes highly symbolic of women's resistance and subversion of repressive patriarchy. Some critics question whether this feminist subversion is complete or successful as Lin Shi does it in a rather unconscious manner. Major critics like David Der-wei Wang and Lu Zhenghui point out that characters in *The Butcher's Wife* are flat,²⁴ an obvious trace of feminist theory that limited the author's imagination and creativity. However, it does not reduce the shocking power of the work itself. The impact of *The Butcher's Wife* is so enormous that it is selected as one of the 30 literary works included in Taiwanese Literary Classics.²⁵ It is the only work by women writers under the category of "fiction," and one of the three by women in the whole newly created canon.²⁶ Of course, the attempt to establish a literary canon is full of problems and is largely determined by political allegiance, which I will discuss later. To a

great extent, the selection of *The Butcher's Wife* not only demonstrates the power of feminism but the significance of Li Ang in the history of Taiwanese literature.

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s with the lift of Marshall Law and rapid development of nativistic nationalism and cultural nationalism, Li Ang has been particularly concerned with the relations between sex and politics, women and nation, feminism and nationalist discourses. Although Li Ang tries to construct, more or less successfully, a feminist sexual nationalist subject as in *The Labyrinthine Garden* (*Miyuan*), her attention to the tension between feminism and nationalism is evident and has finally exploded in *Beigang Incense Urn*. Li Ang compels the readers to see behind noble political ideals for democracy those women whose bodies are sacrificed to the “cause,” either by being faithful to their dead or long imprisoned husbands as well as to the reputation of the Party, or by offering their bodies to the service of male Party members. In the time when DPP takes power in office and the sentiment of nationalism is on the rise, Li Ang forces us to acknowledge the inseparability of nationalist revolution and female sexuality. The lofty fight for democracy and freedom is highly sexualized and scandalized. While her critical feminist voice of resistance put Li Ang side by side in the beginning with oppositional political nationalist movements against the patriarchal authoritarian military KMT government²⁷, the same critical feminist voice has later destabilized the present and rather successful politics of the Democratic Progressive Party.

If Li Ang the female author is sometimes anxious for being politically incorrect, the fictional female author is completely unapologetic. Nothing is more telling about her

intention than what happens in “Empty Mourning Hall” when the female author, on her way home from her lover’s on a late night, notices and enters an empty mourning hall for a suicide martyr. When Mother Wang in the mourning hall asks her to offer incenses for the dead,

She [the female writer] reached out to get [the incenses]. She held in her right hand with thumb and index finger the thin and long incenses, feeling a little prickly. However, the index finger somehow suddenly and clearly felt slippery. Sticky and slippery, not completely washed off after using it to have wiped out sperms coming out of their bodies while making love just now.²⁸

In front of the white mourning linens surrounded by the darkness of the night, the female author finds herself distracted with stains of sperms in her hands. This shocking irreverence, or almost sacrilege, to the dead and the memory of the dead is a direct confrontation between women’s desires, pursuit and enjoyment of sexual pleasure, represented by the female writer,” and repressive realities that demand women’s absolute chastity and devotion, represented by the mourning hall that, like traditional memorial archway of chastity (zhenjie paifang), reminds the surviving women of their duties to her dead husbands.

The female author as a character frequently shows up in Li Ang’s various stories. Often this character represents an educated woman, independent financially and mentally. Her critical thinking opens her eye to sexual and gender injustice in social institutions like family and higher education, and her honesty on more than one occasion enables her to brave through constraints of tradition and morals, with her passion for the unity of love in flesh and in spirit. The female author in “Fake Mask” has written the whole letter in the name of a married woman to a man, a friend and business partner of her husband, with whom she has had an extramarital affair. While the issue of extramarital affair alone

is shocking at the time, the female author more importantly defines unfaithfulness in a different light. For many times in the letter, the heroine has declared that she is writing “not as an unfaithful wife” but “as a woman madly and deeply in love” with him.²⁹

Ironically, she concludes that

Not until now when I am writing to you, having overcome the sense of shame resulted from my husband, have I really understood for the first time that I am indeed unfaithful, in the most common sense, to my husband.³⁰

Incidentally, the heroine is apparently the female author herself.

The female author in *Beigang Incense Urn* is just as independent, if not more.

Unlike the female author in other stories who is directly involved in the affairs presented, the female author here is pro-oppositional-camp, both an insider and an outsider of the oppositional political movements. As a matter of fact, her independence lies in her detachment from politics despite her obvious sympathy with them. While other people seem to follow the increasingly powerful and popular oppositional politics mindlessly and are doing what are expected of them, she says the unspeakable and sees what others turn away from.

The pro-oppositional female author (“qin fanduidang de nu zuojia”) in *Beigang Incense Urn* maintains an intimate relationship with women characters. Sometimes she comments on them, sometimes she talks with them, sometimes she hears about them and other times she writes them into existence. Li Ang tells us that “the grieving mother of nation” first appears in “an informal yet deliberately sentimental article by a pro-oppositional female author.”³¹ The pro-oppositional author tells us that the grieving national mother gains her title with her political achievements that has surprised those who have elected her out of sympathy. On the other hand, the pro-oppositional female

author informs the readers that politics has really meant nothing to this political icon. When the female author praises her for her great sacrifice and outstanding work, the grieving national mother says,

“All of these are not what I want, and they all mean nothing to me. I am not noble nor do I want to sacrifice. I only want what we used to be, my husband by my side, a family, and our two children.”

The female author described that she didn't cry while she spoke, her eyes not even wet. The female author finally wrote,

I will never forget a wife and mother's wish that is so humble and innocent and yet is so difficult to fulfill.³²

It is interesting that the female author does not give this a detailed explanation. Is the grieving national mother blaming the repressive government for having taken away her husband, or is she blaming the oppositional political party for interpellating her into this endless self-effacing and self-sacrificing symbol of the grieving national mother? Is she grieving for her husband or for her own (sexual) desires being taken away? When the female author in the end contemplates the question “who is the devil with chastity belt,” she does not just limit her scrutiny to the grieving mother of nation and her long-term male assistant. She actually directs attention to the threat of female sexuality to nationalist political movements, which in turn control it with invisible chastity belt. Interestingly, as if to prove her determination to sexualize nationalist political movements, the female author in “The Empty Mourning Hall” creates an intimate relationship between a widow and a journalist:

So, when she heard that a male journalist, an acquaintance of hers, wanted to write a series on families of political victims, the female author particularly mentioned the nameless mourning hall in her memory, and the family people had long forgotten.³³

Thus, Lin Yuzhen, the widow who is expected to be abstinent for the sake of her dead husband, and the male journalist begin their long cautious but eventually successful romance.

While depicting female sexuality as disruptive to nationalist politics, the female author announces irreconcilable difference and hence a decisive break between feminism and nationalism. During a symposium where she meets a famous feminist from abroad, she learns from the feminist that women in the student movements of the 1960s became feminists for the reason that, instead of respect for their hard work, they were treated as sexual “buses” or “restrooms” for male colleagues to ride on. The feminist thus explains that the problem is not class but gender, and at the same time the female author concludes, “Therefore, those whom male comrades used to call “buses” or even “restrooms” became feminists.”³⁴

The insider/outsider status of the female author is most evident in “Bloody Sacrifice,” in which she participates in commemorative activities for the 2.28 Incident although her sense of honesty clearly sets her apart from other people around her. She is reluctant to have a rather dramatic make-up done by a professional beautician for a TV interview although that is the routine so that the “new” she would appear “better” for the camera. While the rehearsal make-up makes her look both like her and unlike her, she feels rather different on the day of commemoration. After a thick foundation, eye shadow and lipsticks,

The female author looked at the face in the mirror, and this time she truly felt strange. After she went in the park, she took out a facial tissue and wiped out some of the scarlet lip color. The lip color was obviously rather hard

to come off, layer after layer. When the shiny outlayer was wiped out, its surface color remained the same, only much duller.

The female author wiped back and forth until the lip color came off. But the whole lips seemed dirty, like dry blood stains after some blood sucking.³⁵

Her feelings about the unnatural make-ups are just about the same with her views on the unnatural dramatic stage performances of the tragic 2.28 Incident during the commemoration parades: spectacular and superficial. In her doubt of the significance of superficial remembrance of an important historical event, she seems to be one of the few who seriously cares about the past and the present although she appears passive in comparison to the passion exuberated by other people. The female beautician gladly helps create dramatic facial effects needed for the commemoration, yet she does it for a friend and matter-of-factly, without any emotions for what happened fifty years ago and what it means now although her grandpa was one of the victims tortured to death. On the other hand, the female author cannot identify with the re-created drama, establishing herself as an outside observer of these activities and parades. The dramatic recreation of the story of 2.28 event attempts to retell a story of the oppressed against the oppressors, appealing to the emotions of the audience against the authoritarian KMT, according to Zhang Lingmin.³⁶ As an outsider however, the female author can tell the traces of acting, such as the blood on Lin Jiangmai (the woman who started the whole incident) that looked more like tomato juice on the head of an actress. Yet her genuine concern seemed to give her an insider look on the meanings of the historical incident. Zhang Linmin at the University of Furen argues that Li Ang in the midst of passionate historical re-presentation (chongxian) only shows the impossibility of knowing the original historical truth. In fact, there is no original history to be revealed, and whatever is presented is

simply imitation serving certain political purposes. As Qiu Guifen said (quoted by Zhang), “history is not only a existent past waiting to be rescued so as not to be forgotten, but history is the capital to construct the present and control the future.”³⁷

Her uneasiness, for being both the insider and outsider and at the same time being neither, has enabled the female author to see the hidden and speak the unspeakable. If people of today can “perform the 2.28 Incident” like a show, then nationalist politics itself—its noble ideal—is a show after all.

The female author, both Li Ang and the fictional character, is not at all without ambivalence toward her own feminist project. The female author has always been bold in her exploration and description of female sexuality, yet sex is never the end. Sex in itself does not mean much to Li Ang, who criticizes “Beauty Writers” of Mainland for being superficial. Instead, sex is a means for her to expose larger social problems such as sex education, corporate corruption and sexual violence. Li Ang has been mostly applauded for her feminist struggle up until the publication of *Beigang Incense Urn*, which many feminists believe to cater to a male-centered perception of powerful women exchanging their sexual bodies for political status. In the process of linking women’s sexuality to social issues and nationalist politics, Li Ang seems to always walk a step ahead, stirring up controversies among feminists and in oppositional party. However, saying what others do not dare to say for fear of being politically incorrect, she is thought to be rather conservative. In the words of David Wang, “Li Ang as a feminist thinks it necessary not only to topple the chastity temple but to define the specific ways the chastity temple should be toppled. This is rather moralistic.”³⁸

It is rather ironic for Li Ang to be attacked by feminist critics for *Beigang Incense Urn* since it is feminism and feminist critics that have given meaning and weight to Li Ang's early works on women's sexuality in the first place. Outside feminist critiques, Li Ang is often judged from moral perspectives and is strongly criticized for her "pornographic" portrayal of sex. Insisting that her works are "unhealthy but realistic," she has had to negotiate between being a pioneer modernist writer and pulp novelist. Feminist theories of center/margin, power structure and body politics provide Li Ang with much needed literary legitimacy and help her emerge out of the shadow of pulp fiction.³⁹ On the other hand, Li Ang's daring writings contributes to the rapidly growing interest in feminism and feminist studies. In Der-wei Wang's words, "That gender theories has become mainstream should credit Li Ang with efforts (kulao), if not contribution (gonglao)."⁴⁰ Wu Jinfa once summarizes Li Ang and her significant position in Taiwanese literature very well:

Some women writers before Li Ang in Taiwan might have been well-known for their bold description of "sexual" activities, but they never brought as much an impact as Li Ang did. There might be a great number of "very fashionable" (feichang xinchao) women writers whose writing style was so bold as to shock their readers, they did not bring anything new to Taiwanese literature.⁴¹

Mapping A New Nation with the Female Body

Li Ang is fully recognized, however. Besides the fact that the newly constructed "Taiwan Literary Classic" has been protested by others,⁴² literary historians have rarely acknowledged the achievements of women authors. While most of the critics could not help but falling into the trap of binary thinking, Li Ang complicates and deconstructs established social and political binaries of progressive/conservative, and her characters

often wander and reside in in-between spaces, transgressing boundaries, particularly in *The Labyrinthine Garden* and *Beigang Incense Urn*.

The Beigang Incense Urn Incident embodies an inevitable break of the ambivalent alliance built between feminist struggles and oppositional nationalist movements, between feminist literary practice and oppositional nationalist revision of literary history in Taiwan. *Beigang Incense Urn* is typical of Li Ang in the sense that it continues her ruthless exposure of the hypocrisy of sexual politics in the name of national stability as well as national democracy.

The same feminist aspiration have also inspired her to create *The Labyrinthine Garden* (1991) and the later *Xie Xuehong: An Autobiographical Novel*. Viewing nationbuilding from feminist or female standpoints, Li Ang depict women who struggle between their own (sexual) desires and political calls for submission and sacrifice. Instead of submitting a superficial binary version of political-correctness that view women/Taiwanese natives/victims/powerless as essentially progressive and men/Mainlanders/perpetrator/powerful as essentially conservatives, Li Ang shows how realities are not so clear-cut but full of contradictions and intricate connections. While clearly identifying herself as Taiwanese, she does not maintain a superficial dividing line between Taiwanese natives and Mainlanders, a line drawn and upheld by many critics. Instead, she crosses it frequently with her vacillating characters and their complicated political and sexual relationships. In addition to her criticism of male chauvinism in oppositional struggle for a new nation, she also points out problems in feminist development, especially concerning sex and politics.

Although Li Ang attempts to balance her identities between feminism and nationalism in *The Labyrinthine Garden*, tension is present throughout the novel. If the heroine somehow is able to define herself as an independent Taiwanese woman, it is achieved with such reluctance and loneliness that the ending is hardly a happy one. On the other hand, *Beigang Incense Urn* is a direct feminist critique of the male-centered oppositional struggles for democracy and in a sense is also a self-reflective critique on feminism and feminist movements as well. In Li Ang's stories, women are both aggressive and passive: they may work out strategies to obtain what they want yet they consciously and unconsciously play by traditional gender roles and rules. They are also both self-reliant and dependent since their independence is limited by their financial, political, and/or sexual dependence on men. They are heroines with ambitions while at the same time they are inevitably sex objects pursued by the men they love and do not love. In an either/or era intensified by political struggle for national allegiance, Li Ang defies to be limited in a pre-defined box for her. She is still the "problem writer" as she has been since the late 1960s, and she still does not offer happy and easy solutions to the problems. For critics who are trained to think in an either/or manner, Li Ang and her characters are hard to pinpoint, hence the controversy.

Li Ang's obsession with nationbuilding is not surprising considering the colonial history of Taiwan. Since the concession of Taiwan to Japan in 1895 in the wake of a war, people of Taiwan have had to deal with issues of national identities. Many writers in Taiwan, like those in Mainland, used literature to fight against occupation. The defeat of Japan in WWII automatically returned Taiwan to China. However, the loss of KMT

Nationalist government to the Communist Party in the subsequent civil war again isolated Taiwan from Mainland since the KMT moved their capital to Taipei while preparing to take back their lost territory.

If Taiwanese people rejoiced to be reunited with their motherland, KMT's dictatorship threw them into another turmoil of identity crisis. The concept of "Taiwaneseness" emerged since the nationalist KMT reclaimed Taiwan from the rule of Japan in 1945, especially since 1949, the beginning of the KMT anti-communist and anti-Taiwan government. One way for the KMT government to sustain their dictatorship was "white terror," which was severe punishments, including imprisonment and death, for those who dared to voice any kind of disagreement and doubt. To particularly prevent native Taiwanese from being politically powerful, the KMT government also created a hierarchy that places the mainlanders (people coming to Taiwan) above native Taiwanese people (people born in Taiwan whose ancestors came to Taiwan earlier). The 2.28 Massacre of Taiwanese people, mostly natives, by KMT controlled police in 1947 increased the tension between the Natives and Newcomers, a tension and separation still hotly debated today. While the Japanese colonial rule made the Taiwanese identify with China as a national home, the originally welcomed "Chinese" government proved to be no better, or even worse than the Japanese colonizers, causing a significant dis-identification with China or Chineseness. Consequently, Taiwaneseness became more prominent in the late 1970s and 1980s, and had attracted much attention and political power since the lift of Martial Law in 1987 and the beginning of democracy and political differences.

Taiwanese-ness has become a more imminent issue after the cultural and economic exchanges across the Taiwan Strait. The significant differences between the Mainland and Taiwan due to forty years of different and isolated developments has made Taiwan an “obvious” separate entity; but more critically, Taiwanese-ness is foregrounded against the “threat” posed upon Taiwan by the Mainland. First, the Mainland has great resources of population, land, military forces and strong economy. Second,

Due to the past thirty years of anti-communist propaganda, it is also a backward, savage, highly centralized nation that denies personal freedom. To make things worse, this nation also claims that it has sovereignty over Taiwan (and all nations who have diplomatic relations with the Communist China admits it), and that, someday, it will be “united” with Taiwan. Whenever Taiwan explicitly demonstrates self-governing, it will spread the words that it will not give up using “force” to unite, if necessary.⁴³

When the Republic of China could no longer represent China and people in Taiwan could no longer represent Chinese in the world, it was imperative that Taiwan should have a history of its own, which can be constructed only by itself. As always, literature and literary criticism became a forceful medium for the production of the new “imagined national community” as opposed to the official documents recorded by KMT, especially after the end of Martial Law when oppositional movements led by the Democratic Progressive Party swept Taiwan and later won the Presidential election.

Great efforts and attention have been paid to the rewriting of the literary history in Taiwan. Ye Shitao, Chen Fangming and Peng Ruijin are some of the major critics in this field that promote a Taiwanese consciousness that not only separates Taiwan from China but further places China in the position of a colonizer, no different from the Netherlands and Japan. They assert that Taiwan literature is essentially and fundamentally resistance literature against foreign control. The 1987 *Outline of the History of Taiwanese*

Literature by Ye Shitao is a milestone for its advocate of nativism. For the first time, Taiwan Literature is not just a branch under “Chinese Literature” but has its own tradition due to its specific colonial and political history. Instead, Taiwan literature is part of World Chinese-language Literature. Accentuating the importance of Taiwanese consciousness in literary works, Ye maps out the journey of Taiwan Literature from the influence of Chinese literary tradition to the development of its own independent characters and at the same time defines Taiwanese literature:

A History of Taiwan Literature has to pay attention to the historical experiences shared by Taiwanese people. That is, it has to be observed from the perspective of the oppressed under the hegemony of foreign nations. These bitter over-300-year experiences could resonate with no one but the present residents of Taiwan.⁴⁴

Impacted by the force of Ye’s arguments, Chen Fangming develops the concept of nativism from a post-colonial perspective. According to Chen, the issue of national identity is particularly significant in Taiwan literature since it is colonial and post-colonial literature. He connects the anti-Japanese literature during the Japanese occupation with the anti-KMT writing when China took over. Instead of viewing China as Taiwan’s motherland, Chen regards the KMT government as a foreign invasion.⁴⁵ Peng Ruijin follows similar framework and focuses on the search for the national soul of Taiwan in their resistance experiences.

Although “Taiwan Literature” as an academic discipline is established at more and more colleges and universities, debates are still going on about what exactly is Taiwan Literature and which authors are worthy of being included into the map of literary history. Some critics, particularly feminist critics, challenge Ye and Peng for their exclusion of a large majority of women writers and literary trends focusing on themes

and concerns other than resistance, such as Modernist literature in the 1960s. Feminist critic Peng Xiaoyan points out that Taiwanese literary tradition should show more acceptance of diverse interests of different ethnicities. Commenting on Ye's negative attitude toward some writers' nostalgia (of the Mainland), rootlessness and exile, Peng writes:

Taiwan has always been an "immigrant society (25)." There have been a great number of immigrants before and after 1949, which is a historical reality. In such an immigrant society, if some writings reflect immigrant mentalities (such as nostalgia, rootlessness, and exile), it means that they reflect part of social "realities" of Taiwan and represent the voices of certain ethnicities and groups in Taiwan. If we say that the voices of ethnic minorities do not represent Taiwanese realities, then we are guilty of avoiding this part of realities and history of Taiwan.⁴⁶

Feminist critic Qiu Guifen directs attention to the necessary role that literary history plays in the fate of authors and their works. Besides gender, Chiu explained, borrowing from Guillory, that what matters most for an author or a piece of literary work in order to have longevity were not individual readers, but whether or not the author or the work could be included in a system of cultural reproduction, such as curriculum, literary history and tradition.⁴⁷ Chiu argues that literary historians sacrifice writers of different voices when they pay too much attention to political correctness in their emphasis of resistance literature. It is one of the major reasons that Li Ang is attacked for her *Beigang Incense Urn*.

The heart of the matter is that each piece of work on literary history is simply one of many possible interpretations of Taiwan literature. While Ye, Peng and Chen concentrate on resistance literature that disassociate Taiwan from China, there are other established literary history considering Taiwanese literature is still part of the larger Chinese literary tradition, although with its own characteristics.⁴⁸ Some critics define

Taiwan Literature as Chinese literature in Taiwan, confirming a historical and present tie between Taiwan and China while accentuating the spirit of resistance against foreign occupation and domestic dictatorship.

Li Ang's works since *The Labyrinthine Garden* are heavily influenced by the trend of oppositional movement, in which Li Ang was intimately involved for a while. *The Labyrinthine Garden* was published during the years of her participation in oppositional politics and understandably attempts to reconcile between women and the nation. *Beigang Incense Urn* is more straightforward and poignant a feminist critique since it began at the time when Li Ang realized that she "just spent a lot of time volunteering behind the scene for some arrogant and absurd political ideals."⁴⁹ At the age when the struggles between "independence" and "unification" become more and more intense, Li Ang walks a path from infusing Taiwanese-ness with Chinese-ness in *The Labyrinth* to deconstructing oppositional politics in *Beigang Incense Urn*.

The Labyrinthine Garden is considered Li Ang's ambitious project of imagining a gendered nation. While it is common to talk about motherlands, Li Ang's project is to connect women's oppressed realities with Taiwan's colonial history. "I was born at the end of Jia-wu War (the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895)," says Zhu Yinghong, the heroine representing Taiwan, for several times throughout the novel and mostly unconsciously. This is highly symbolic as the Jia-wu War ended with the defeat of China, (as usual whenever forced to fight against imperialist invaders) and a humiliating unequal treaty (as usual) in which China not only had to compensate a large amount of money to Japan, but more significantly concede Taiwan to the colonial rule of Japan. Regarding the Jia-wu War as the beginning of a new Taiwan, instead of national humiliation imposed

by a foreign race, Li Ang is determined to cut Taiwan off from any reference to China. In this sense, the issue is not that China is divided or fragmented or humiliated, but that Taiwan is born and from then on free from China and later from Japan. Li Ang conveys this message through Zhu Yinghong's father in his letter to his daughter:

... In fact you can say that you were born at the end of the Jia-wu War. In August 1894, Jia wu War broke out. In September, the Qing was defeated in the Huanghai (Yellow Sea) Battle. In the next year, which was 1895, the Northern Sea Navy was defeated by Japan on February 22. ... On April 17, Shimonoseki Treaty was concluded, conceding Taiwan and Liaodong Peninsula (Manchuria) to Japan for thirty years. On May 25, Taiwan announced the founding of the Democratic Republic of Taiwan. ... [I]n October, Japan put down the rebellion in Taiwan...⁵⁰

The fact that Zhu Yinghong states rather unconsciously that she/Taiwan was born in 1895 proves quite forceful for the reason that it informs us that this beginning of Taiwan history is deeply rooted in the psyche of Taiwanese people. As a result, Taiwan is whole on its own with its own constructed "origin," instead of being a small part of some other nation—China. The dis-identification with China, represented by the KMT regime, is so strong that Zhu's father, a political dissident accused of being a communist and suffering from imprisonment and illnesses, refuses to speak Mandarin Chinese—the National Language. It is ironic that Zhu Yinghong does not know that she has a Japanese name—Ayako—as a result of Japanese occupation, until after the Japanese occupation. For, in his own way of protest against the Japanese imperialist policy that all has to change their Chinese names to Japanese names and speak Japanese, Zhu's father demands that everyone speak Minnanhua⁵¹ at home. On the other hand, the Zhu family begin to use Japanese language and names at home to show their fight against the KMT's "white terror." Zhu's father often tells her that "[t]here is n need to read those useless [newspapers]. All is fake and all are lies." He even tries to stop her from cutting he hair

so that she would be refused admission by her High School and that she would not “have to believe those lies.”⁵² However, some critics question the choice of Japanese language over Minnanhua (Taiwanese language) that Zhu chooses battling against the KMT.

Li Ang’s construction of Taiwanese history does not stop here. At the same time she identifies with Taiwan, she challenges its imagined purity, its greatness and its maleness, and constructs a kind of national map that embraces both Chineseness and Taiwaneseness. In fact there has been identification with Chineseness throughout the book, even unconsciously. When Zhu’s father decides never to speak Chinese at home, he compares the Japanese, the foreign race, with the Chinese:

It is ironic that I found one day that, it [the Chinese KMT government] was not the foreign race, but was more cruel than the foreign race; it was not invaders, but more blood-thirsty than the invaders. Therefore, I again employed the language of the foreign race and used it to educate my children.⁵³

Underneath his dis-identification with the politically exclusive Chineseness represented by the KMT government, he truly identifies with the culturally inclusive Chineseness that would embrace and respect the Taiwanese. This cultural mixture is also embodied by the Garden built more than two hundred years ago by ancestors of Zhu Yinghong, whose own name derives from Yinghong Xuan, one of the buildings in the Garden.

It is widely accepted that Li Ang creates the Garden to represent the past, the present and the future of Taiwan. Many critics believe that the story in which Zhu’s father decides to switch plants demonstrates Li Ang’s political identity with Taiwan and distance from China. I agree with this argument, but only to a point. The problem of this interpretation is that it simplifies the complicated relationship between China and Taiwan by putting them in exclusive opposition. It also ignores the intricacy and subtlety of Li Ang’s Garden. The truth is, Li Ang is rather ambivalent about her national belonging and

refuses to fall into the either/or opposition. Her Garden, Han Yuan, represents a tradition combining both Chinese culture and Taiwanese features. The Garden originates from an imitation of northern Chinese garden and thus from the beginning Zhu's ancestors has tried to plant some plants, which, if not completely the same with the original Chinese plants, resembles them in name at least. However, the over-a-hundred-years-old tree has never functioned quite the same as those in northern China. In addition, the pine trees in the Garden have never flourished. As a result, they are removed and replaced with Phoenix trees, a typical local plant that grew fast and steadily. Yet this is not the end of the story. In fact, the story continues until Zhu's family has to remove most of the flowering phoenix trees so as not to destroy buildings in the garden. If we remember that the existence of the garden is a memory of the Chinese past, however different it might be from the "origin," then the removal of the Taiwanese Phoenix trees is also significant and symbolic of the national identity of Taiwan. If allowed to grow on their own, the Phoenix trees that represent Taiwan would have completely destroyed the garden, erasing any reference to any Chineseness or China. However, the decision is to eliminate many Phoenix trees so as to *maintain the [Chinese] garden that grew Taiwanese local trees*.

Of course some critics point out that origins of re-planted trees are not Taiwan and that some of the trees pulled out actually grow locally. But as Lin Fangmei says, Li Ang actually subverts a binary opposition between the native and the foreign. In Lin's words, "What is native? What is foreign? Li Ang breaks through viewpoints based on essentialism and originism, and constructs from various facets—from plant selections, garden architecture, characterization and historical changes—Taiwan's hybrid identity."⁵⁴

The new hybrid of Taiwanese-ness and Chinese-ness is also shown in the name of the garden, Han Yuan (the lotus garden), which pronounces the resemblance of Han Yuan (the Chinese garden). Although Zhu's father has considered changing Han Yuan into Phoenix Yuan, this elimination of Chinese-ness is never implemented. While its Chinese-ness is kept, its Taiwanese characters are greatly emphasized. At the ceremony when Zhu donates this private garden to Han Yuan fund Association so that it would be open to the public, she says: "I want this garden to belong to Taiwan, to the twenty millions of Taiwanese, but never to belong to any government that oppresses the people."⁵⁵

An interesting twist in *The Labyrinthine Garden* proves Li Ang's ambivalence toward the new identity of Taiwan. For several times in the novel, Zhu's father tells a story of their pirate ancestor Zhu Feng, who defeated the Dutch and was called "China Captain" by the Dutch. Contrary to other relatives of the Zhu clan who refuses to recognize Zhu Feng the Pirate as their ancestor, Zhu's father is tremendously proud of Zhu Feng and asks Zhu Ying-hong to remember him and the pirates like him:

Early immigrants in Taiwan could only cross the Taiwan Strait safely with their [the pirates'] guidance, even taking their pirate ships. Ayako, you must not forget, early immigrants in Taiwan were not all poor people or refugees, but had among them many adventurers like Zhu Feng. They attempted, in somewhere remote and isolated by the ocean, to find a new happy land. And Taiwan was their newly found happy land."⁵⁶

That Zhu Yinghong includes Zhu Feng into the family reinforces her father's argument that Taiwan is Zhu Feng's home and Taiwan starts with Zhu Feng, a pirate. As Zhu Yinghong states in the end, "In fact there are materials to prove that Zhu Feng was indeed the ancestor of our Zhu family, and we should not disown him because he was a pirate." However, this activates a curse by Zhu Feng's wife—"Whoever included Zhu Feng into

the family would end up with no offsprings.” Although Zhu Yinghong manages to get married to Lin Xigeng, she could never be pregnant again as a result of her abortion when heartbroken by Lin.

The historical realities created by Li Ang are full of conflicts. Although the complicated self-conflicting character Zhu Yinghong does not conform to the either/or binary framework, she embodies Li Ang’s suspicion of women’s space within nationalist discourses. On the one hand, Zhu Yinghong is independent, daring and fully aware of her power and situations. She would not give in when laughed at her line “I was born at the end of Jia-wu War” and she insists that Zhu Feng be welcomed as the ancestor of the Zhu clan. While romantic as any woman would like, she is cynical and disillusioned:

I had told myself, what I wanted was only a longing to be satisfied and to be had, a touch that could not be completed solely by myself. But this comfort could only come from hugs and touches by a man.

Then I know immediately that I would not be understood and that I would inevitably be disappointed.⁵⁷

In her relationship with Lin Xi-geng, she tries to be as active as possible. In fact, she is more a predator than a prey. Although she is overwhelmed in the beginning by Lin’s look and talent, she takes actions without hesitation in order to get hold of Lin. On the one hand, she plays in front of him an extremely feminine role—quiet, supportive and seductively innocent; on the other, she manages to find a sexual partner to make Lin so jealous that he would want her. When all the means, including pregnancy and being sexually harassed by Lin’s coworker, fails to secure her with the promise of marriage, she simply refuses to be stuck as Lin’s mistress. She instead has an abortion and ignores Lin completely, which ironically earns her a marriage to him. Zhu in the end “subverts” her own original intention to marry Lin, the man she loves so much that she has temporarily

lost her self.⁵⁸ After Lin proposes to her, “Zhu Yinghong stared at the man in front of her. What occurred to her at that moment was that she seemed to have never loved him.”⁵⁹

However, all the independent actions of Zhu only testify that she is dependent and passive in a deeper sense. She is for the most part contained by patriarchal values and rules. She seems to be consumed to the idea of getting married to nobody but Lin, the womanizer she is aware of. If this could be explained by love, her decision to marry Lin does not make sense when she is least interested in marriage at the time. Moreover, except the title of Lin’s wife, she is no different from Lin’s other mistresses and has to employ a driver for Lin in order to find information about his whereabouts. In addition, many of her decisions are only reactions to the fact that Lin is in control before and after marriage and that Zhu depends upon him, at least financially.

Li Ang’s new Taiwanese identity is thus problematic. Some critics are critical of Li Ang’s contradictory representations of Zhu Yinghong and the new identity of Taiwan. They assert that the world of Zhu Yinghong is filled with nothing but sex and money, showing Li Ang’s compromise with capitalism.⁶⁰ However, it is this contradiction that reflects the complicated interdependent struggles between capitalism, feminism, nationalism and sexual politics.

This contradiction is even more prevalent in Li Ang’s *Incense Urn*. In fact, all of the main female characters in the *Beigang Incense Urn* series have to negotiate their own sexual identities, more or less like Zhu Yinghong in *The Labyrinthine Garden*, within the new nationalist space that both inspires their struggles against authoritarian politics and constricts them with similar objectifying gaze turning them either to oversexed siren to avoid or to asexual goddess to worship. It is the transgression of prescribed proprieties by

these women that causes the whole controversy. By extension, Li Ang the female author, as the creator of these “improper” women, is deemed “improper” too.

The Female Body against Nationalist Interpellation: Sex, Politics, and Scandals

David Der-wei Wang argues that Li Ang practices an “aesthetics of scandal,” which is intimately linked to sex.⁶¹ He believes that scandals “have become the best approach that Li Ang thinks and critique sex problems” and that “Li Ang’s novels themselves are often the center of scandals, being gossiped and speculated.”⁶² *Beigang Incense Urn* is thus four stories of sexual scandals, the fate of political women who complete, in their oppositional political struggles, their life circle from fallen angels to self-salvation.⁶³ Starting with the secretive romantic desires of a wife of an long imprisoned oppositional representative in “The Devil with Chastity Belts”, to the hidden or explicit pursuit of passion by the widows of martyrs in “The Empty Mourning Hall”, from the bold devotion of the female body to the (male) Party in “Beigang Incense Urn” and finally to the complete dedication and sacrifice of a mother/widow, *Beigang Incense Urn* vividly portrays political scandals carried out in the name of the ideal or Party.

Inspiring as Wang’s allegorical interpretation of political scandals, it does not explain the different meanings of the term “scandal.” It seems to automatically equal the scandal to the corruption of the females and the female bodies, even though it for several times directs attention to the injustice and unfairness of male-centered politics to these women. In other words, the implicit message is that women, particularly sexual women, are essentially scandalous and thus need salvation. However, “sexual scandals” can also be seen as a subversive force in women’s struggles against the sexist nationalist

interpellation. The “real” scandal, therefore, does not lie in these women but in the masculine (oppositional) nationalist discourses.

Beigang Incense Urn presents different ways of women, revolutionary or political, experiencing sexuality. All aspects of these experiences, from secrecy to explicitness, from romance to sex, from active pursuit of sexual pleasure to provocative ambition to subvert men with one’s body (yong shenti dianfu nanren), are linked, told, gossiped and commented by “the female author,” a reappearing character in the four stories included. Through this “female author,” Li Ang as a female author portrays the bleak status of women in the supposedly progressive politics. Ironically, “the female author”—Li Ang and the character—tackles puritanical political hypocrisy with a blatant reference to sex.

The female body functions in three ways in the space of nationalist politics. It is first made a Political Symbol of a Grieving Mother (of the Nation) with no sexual desires. Secondly, the female body functions like a Lustful Widow who pursues her passion, half-secretly if needed and ignoring the call to chastity. Lastly, the female body of the Unrestrained Woman offers itself as sacrifice for the oppositional political ideal.

The Political Symbol of Grieving Mother (of the Nation)

The Grieving Mother of the Nation (beiqing guomu) and the Grieving Mother (beiqing muqin) in general is one of the major calls of nationalist discourses to women—wives whose husbands are either dead or imprisoned for their cause of political oppositions. Except the title story, *Beigang Incense Urn* follows the lives of these women, for whom the political turmoil of Taiwan, has forever changed their “normal”

ordinary lives as teachers, beauticians, wives and mothers. The death or imprisonment of their husbands has also forever bound them to the duties as grieving wives and mothers. Instead of continuing to live their own lives, they find themselves thrown into oppositional movements in their husbands' stead, treated as replacements of their husbands and sometimes given as a result respect and significant political power, whether they like it or not. In the process of grieving and remembering, these women become political puppets living in the shadow of their husbands, instead of self-fulfilled human beings with a new start in their shattered lives. For, respect and power are only given at their own cost, and chastity has to be maintained. The grieving widow becomes nothing but a female man, and nothing but a political symbol.

Li Ang shocks us into realization of the necessity and significance of women's chastity to the success of political movements. In order to achieve and maintain the status of being sexually pure, fetishism of Mother comes into play. Although Mother comes into being through childbirth as a result of sex, the cultural concept and image of mother and motherhood are essentially asexual and thus fetishized, just like the Virgin Mother. In addition, she is a grieving mother, a mother who turns all her sexual energy into self-effacing grief. Thus, she forever grieves for the loss of her husband, devoting herself to politics and living for the cause her husband has died for. Being respectfully interpellated as the Grieving Mother of the Nation, they have *become* the Grieving Mother of Nation with all the emotional, political and cultural attachments.

The Grieving Mother of Nation in "The Devil with Chastity Belt" finds herself in the position of her husband, an of oppositional representative, when he is imprisoned. She used to be a typical feminine woman who enjoys being the "pretty little wife" and cares

about nothing but her two children, “Japanese flower art, Tea art and literature” and her profession as a music teacher.⁶⁴ Suddenly she has to renounce all her past in order to be a representative, a Grieving Mother of Nation, and a “Strong Mother of Nation” (jianqiang de guomu) to continue the unfinished lofty cause of her husband’s. During the many years of working with her assistant, an undefined emotional attachment is secretly developed between her and her assistant. It is potentially damaging to the oppositional party since it would surely be a scandal if found out. Just like the publication of Li Ang’s book that damages the reputation of the oppositional party, the political significance attached to the symbol of Grieving Mother of Nation would ensure that a love affair between the supposedly pure mother figure and her assistant would ruin not only themselves, but the imprisoned husband and the whole oppositional struggles. The female representative has to repress her romantic desires in order to play her role as a political symbol until a trip to Europe makes it possible for the two of them to be alone and to be just two ordinary tourists with no cultural and political burdens.

While sexual desire is repressed in Taiwan, Europe is a juxtaposing space that encourages it. The trip to Europe is officially planned so that she could meet oppositional Taiwanese in exile, but for the two characters, it is a journey to their romantic discovery. Although sex does not happen between them, sexual tension is certainly relieved through political sex jokes told by the tour guide, and sexual pleasure is surely felt in their laughter. The serious and sometimes critical political deadlock between the Mainland and Taiwan is turned into a joke of sexual intercourses between a Taiwanese man and a Mainland woman. Along with the assumed importance of political movements, the necessary symbolic meaning of Grieving Mother of Nation is also laughed away. From

missing the first sex joke to laughing from her heart the later ones, she is transformed back to a woman with her own emotions and needs, particularly her need for love and romance. The trip gives her a space and time to define it, develop it, feel it and live it, however short it is.

Female sexuality dominates the space of Europe. The story actually starts with a tourist picture of the sculpture of the devil with chastity belt, about which she asks and he answers. Later the readers realize that this happens in the middle of the sex jokes on the tour bus.

He gazed at her bright heartfelt laughing face. For a while, he seemed to have never met this woman.

It was at this moment that she pointed at a picture of part of a sculpture of a naked male on the traveling book she had been looking through, and asked him sitting by her side,

“What is this?”

“It’s the devil.” He answered without hesitation...

Only then did it occur to her that she was pointing at a pointed tail covering the lower part of the devil’s body and asking a young man what it was. And that pointed tail couldn’t cover all the important part, but with the help of the thighs turning inward, it was not exposed. Yet it also left room for imagination.

Embarrassed, blush rushed to her face.⁶⁵

Romance replaces political talks from then on. She calls him “the devil” and he calls her “godmother of sleeping beauty” who waits to be awakened. They fight and laugh like a couple in love, they share facial moisturizer and he buys her two bunches of white flowers. These little white flowers are significant and symbolize sexual desire between them. When she pins a few on the collar of her low-cut silk nightgown, she cannot fall asleep but keep thinking about the sculpture of the devil. At the same time, the flowers with little openings seem to be ready like her, and the hard leaves penetrate her nightgown and stroke her breasts.⁶⁶ After “a whole night of absorbing the body’s warmth

raging like lava,” the little white flowers “oozed out some thick sticky liquid, filling the hollow little openings of petals, which...was in sound sleep and was not to wake up again.” As for the leaves, they “were no longer hard but soft and shriveled. The leaves didn’t have the strength to stand up and their tips could no longer penetrate.”⁶⁷

The end of the trip is necessary, however reluctant the representative and her assistant are to leave. Trying their best to stay as long as they could, political cause calls them back to Taiwan, where masks have to be worn and feelings hidden. For the representative, sexuality could only be experienced in imagined time and space, and would never be deemed appropriate for her role as the Mother of the Nation. The role of Grieving Mother of the Nation, given by a modern politically progressive party, seems no different from the Chastity Archway for widows in the old feudal days.

The Grieving Mother as a symbol is more down to-earth, in comparison of the Grieving Mother of the Nation. Politically she is not as important, since her husband was neither a leader nor a representative. Yet symbolically she is no less necessary. In “Bloody Sacrifice,” the heroine is respectfully addressed as Mother Wang. The 2.28 Incident and what followed it fifty years ago has left her husband dead and herself struggling for survival. It is not that she has no skills to earn her living since she is an excellent beautician for brides. It is the constant harassment from the KMT intelligence agents that not only scares her and her son but scares away customers, for whom, connection to oppositional politics in any way is the last thing they would wish to do. As time goes by, she becomes a make-up artist for the dead, and it is no one other than herself who reconstructs the face and body of her husband, victim to political violence of KMT government. From then on, she devotes herself to oppositional movements, and

physically overworks so much so that she could not continue without others' help. Yet she has to continue to work, for it is time for her to be the beautician for her son, who has allegedly died of "acute hepatitis." In addition, she has to work alone, in secret, for although she herself has no sexual scandal to hide, her son is a transvestite, a gay.

Mother Wang loses contact with her son right after she discovers his secret by accident. During her unexpected return to home one night, she finds her son in pink evening gown, wearing a wig of long hair, heavy make-ups on his face with half-finished lips. Suddenly it occurs to her that the stout KMT intelligence agent who watches them every day has wanted her son, not her. Rumors says that a person who looks like Mother Wang's son is found in the arms of stout middle-aged and old men, which is a heavy blow to Mother Wang's hope for her son to revive and bring honor to the family. Looking back, Mother Wang sees clues that the KMT intelligence agent is there for her son, her gay son. It is unclear whether Mother Wang's son is gay before or after the involvement of the intelligence agent. Some argue that the intelligence agent has sexually molested Mother Wang's son, a child, thus castrating her son into a gay, or a feminine man.⁶⁸ However, the issue of homosexuality is not treated as a disease in the story, particularly in the end. Although the story does not give much information on the nature of the relationship between the agent and Mother Wang's son, it was the agent who made the issue of homosexuality to reality. Again, Li Ang complicates political tension through sexual relationship, erasing the clear-cut line between friend and foe. Consequently, the riddle of the mysterious disease that kills Mother Wang's son—an ambitious young doctor—is also solved. He does not die of hepatitis but the unspeakable shameful AIDS.

The end of the story states that Mother Wang finishes her makeover of her son, whose suits are taken off and whose pink evening gown is put on instead, with eye shadow, facial powder and blush, and lipsticks. Mother Wang said, “From now on, no need to pretend any more.” However, this “no need to pretend any more” is accomplished by Mother Wang’s careful concealment. Just like the Grieving Mother of Nation who has to hide whatever feelings between her and her assistant for fear of scandal, Mother Wang must conceal her knowledge about her son’s scandalous sexuality and humiliating disease. In order to do that, she insists on having some solitary time, alone with her son’s body. With every bit of her remaining energy, Mother Wang works hard to reconstruct her son, giving back his identity. With the lock of her son’s coffin, she would continue to be the Grieving Mother giving herself up to oppositional movements.

The Lustful Widow (fenliu guafu)

The Grieving Mother of the Nation is fetishized not only as an asexual mother but also as an object of male sexual gaze. The repressed sexual desire is released through the body of the Lustful Widow, the id of the Grieving Mother of the Nation. Relatively free from constant social and political restraints and judgments, the Lustful Widow seeks pleasure.

The Lustful Widow is a rather traditional character of contradiction. By law and customs she has to devote her self and whole life to her husband, alive and dead, for one woman would not serve two husbands (yinu bushi erfu). Many times she is expected to take her own life to show her chastity to the clan, which is greatly honored by her act and would in turn honor her by building a chastity memorial archway for her and women to

come. For the rest of the living widows, remarriage is difficult and would forever burden them with shame. Naturally, they would be severely punished if found guilty of adultery. However, the widow who is supposed to be chaste is also oversexualized. It is almost expected that she would be guilty of betraying her dead husband, and thus every contact she may or may not have with any other men would be interpreted as sexual. Thus, we have the saying, “Trouble is abundant at the door of the widow.” The severe punishment hangs overhead like a sword that could attack any time and it only intensifies the voyeuristic male gaze.

Li Ang in “The Empty Mourning Hall” creates a modern Lustful Widow—Lin Yuzhen, in juxtaposition with the image of the Grieving Mother of the Nation. Both of their husbands die in fire. On the one hand, “the Founding Father of Taiwan” has set himself on fire in his office. The fact that his father has been imprisoned for twenty years makes the second-generation sacrifice even more impressive. In addition, his action shows his pure devotion to political ideals since his finance is in good condition. Therefore, he deserves the title “founding father of Taiwan” and his widow should receive the highest respect possible. On the other hand, Lin Yuzhen’s husband—Wu Tianjin—has died in a suspicious fire accident in his bed, where he has just had sex with his mistress, who is said to be a government intelligent agent spying on him. Moreover, he has had huge financial problems. His death has won Lin Yuzhen some sympathy and support from people in oppositional camp, but not even close to what the widow of “the founding father of Taiwan” has had.

Despite the apparent different treatments from the oppositional camp, Lin Yuzhen and the grieving widow of the “founding father of Taiwan” share more than many critics

have acknowledged. In a sense, the widow of the “founding father of Taiwan” is the ego, under constant surveillance with the threat of punishment; and Lin Yuzhen is the id, the uncontrollable sexual desire that transforms the married “Tianjin Sao” named after her husband Wu Tianjin to a vague yet self-defined “Yuzhen Zi (Sister Yuzhen).”

The widow of the “founding father of Taiwan” is first addressed as “So-and-so Sao.” Although the term “Sao” means sister, it is used to address a *married* sister-in-law and married women in general. Often it is named after the husband, a little like Mrs. in the English language. “Sao” emphasizes the married status, the husband’s ownership and sexual unavailability, and she is expected to be sexually pure and stainless (*qingbai*). In fact, it is her sexual purity that determines whether she wins the congress election. As Li Ang says in the story,

A fresh participant in politics from an innocent family background, the widow wouldn’t have any dark political records, except that the most lethal weapon against the widow who participates in the election to continue the cause of her husband is, whether she has betrayed her noble husband.

So there were many whispers that she had long humiliated her husband, “the founding father of Taiwan. Soon after her martyr husband dies for his political ideal, she had a hidden affair with her driver.”⁶⁹

Inside gossips about the widow’s affairs continues throughout the story. In the disguise of demanding moral purity from the grieving widow, people are really anticipating sexual scandals with excitement. Essentially, the grieving widow is a sexualized and asexual political symbol whose power can be taken away any time so as to penalize any “improper” behaviors.

On the other side of the same coin is Lin Yuzhen, who suffers from constant harassment from KMT intelligent agents and consequently loss of employment. Her involvement in oppositional politics is accidental as a result of her husband’s death in the

fire accident. Like the widow of “the founding father of Taiwan,” Lin Yuzhen is called “Tianjin Sao,” which earns her respect, emotional support and sometimes concern in the form of a small amount of money. Thus,

At the Service Department of the representative, “Tianjin Sao” became a special honor. At first she felt secretly rejoiced. But soon she found that “Tianjin Sao” did nothing but cut off her relations with men. Within this circle, her husband was still the KMT-created victim (not enough to be a martyr), although the widows of the victims were treated just like the widows of martyrs. They could only be worshiped like memorial tablets, and they should not damage the morals of the oppositional camp.⁷⁰

Interestingly, the whispers about the affairs of the widow of “the founding father of Taiwan”—or the grieving mother of the Nation—lead “Tianjin Sao” to her sexual freedom as the Lustful Widow. Since the powerful and highly respected widow of “the founding father of Taiwan” cannot be faithful, why should she be, especially when the political cause of her husband is not lofty at all? He is involved in oppositional party in the hope to have maximum personal gains while taking big risks, and he does not choose to burn himself, like the leader of the Party, but seems to die in a fire accident. In addition, he is sexually involved with the female KMT intelligence agent spying on him. Why should she keep her chastity (shou zhen) for him? Why should she refrain from sexual pleasure? Without symbolic burden of motherhood and nationhood, the Lustful Widow considers sexual pleasure a priority over her socially defined duties to her dead husband as a widow. Ironically, her name is Lin Yuzhen (Jade Chastity), as pure and chaste as jade.⁷¹ Soon, “Tianjin Sao” becomes “Yuzhen Zi,” Sister Yuzhen, an unspoken sign of sexual availability.

More interestingly, Lin Yuzhen finds her sexual partners by gossiping about the alleged affairs of the grieving mother of the nation. They test each other by talking

cautious about the sexual allegations in the guise of oppositional political discussions, and make clear their intentions. When “Yuzhen Zi” is being interviewed by a male journalist who wants to write a series of report on the families of oppositional victims, she cannot remember much about her husband except his affairs. She cares about nothing but the sexual scandal of the widow of “the founding father of Taiwan, which is all that she talks about later on the phone. They have successfully seen each other with the company of her daughter in the name of making her daughter to happier. However, when her daughter decides to drop out of the group of three so that they would not have any excuse to see each other, “Yuzhen Zi” again mentions the affair of the other widow, which leads to a vague sexual hint and eventually to what she wants. The much talked sexual scandal of the Grieving Mother of the Nation to an extent serves as flirts and foreplay, and the Grieving Mother of the Nation is finally one with the Lustful Widow.

The death of political husbands has lead Lin Yuzhen and other women to oppositional struggles. While the husband is deified, the widow is worshiped too. Many people donate their money to her, embarrassed to mention that what they could give her could not be compared to her loss and sacrifice, referring to the death of her husband. What they neglect is how their worship of the widow forces her to continue to sacrifice, although this time it is her life instead of his. David Wang rightly points out that an invisible chastity memorial archway is built for her in the name of democracy: “Did she observe the rules of chastity for her husband or for the Party? It is no longer clear.”⁷² However, her position as the worshiped holy Mother of the Nation is as vulnerable as the Lustful Widow. The demand of her chastity is only the beginning of a sexualized male gaze and a demand for her sexual objectification. In one of Lin Yuzhen’s sexual

encounters, she pinpointed the truth, “You want to do Mother of Nation, don’t you?”⁷³ At her flirtatious words, the man reaches climax.

The Unconstrained Woman (haofang nu)

Compared with ambivalence invoked by the image of grieving widows, the Unconstrained Woman takes it all the way, spicing up oppositional struggles for democracy. Taking the formula of revolution plus love one step further, Li Ang emphasizes revolution plus sex. As a result, instead of uplifting heroic romantic stories, Li Ang’s new formula lays bare the brutal truth of women’s sacrifice, which has earned them nothing but the title of “bus.” The women who have devoted their bodies to the revolution and revolutionary men become “buses” on which everybody could get a ride. Lin Lizi, a female representative, of “Beigang Incense Urn” is one of the Unconstrained Women. After the success of the revolution, she transforms her body from a serving tool to a subversive weapon.

Unlike the secrecy and cover-ups of the Grieving Mother and the Lustful Widow, the Unconstrained Woman accentuates the charm of her sexy body and advocates sexual power. With high heels, a low-cut shiny shirt and a miniskirt with animal pattern, Lin Lizi thus comes to an early March conference on women’s policies and how women get power. When asked about the strategies of women to take power back from men, she replies, “Using women’s body to subvert men.”⁷⁴

It seems that Lin Lizi is successful in obtaining political power. Her charm and fierceness become the focus of the media. However, her position and power are not at all respected but become entertaining materials for gossips among male and female

colleagues. After all, she is still subject to moral judgments and voyeuristic gaze.

Interestingly, she finds herself in a dilemma not quite different from the constrained widows. On the one hand, she is shunned and considered a slut who sleeps her way up to the top, instead of her talent and abilities. On the other hand, she is an object of sexual fantasies. While commenting with satisfaction that her “cousins”—men who she has slept with—could use ten tables if they ever attend her wedding, these other men—non-cousins—could not help but fantasize her body and their sexual encounters with her. Not only the “cousins” are free from judgment, the “cousins” themselves join the crowd to blame her. Jiang Mingtai, the leader whom Lin Lizi loves and wants to marry, explains to her that he could not marry her for the exact reason that her “cousins” are so many (“at least five to six tables”) that they could destroy the wedding.⁷⁵ What he does not say is that he could also be destroyed and that he really could not live without power.

Women in oppositional movements have not treated her any better. When those “women scholars, women lawyers, women representatives and women community leaders” hear Lin Lizi’s strategy for women to gain power, “obvious contempt and hatred appeared” on their faces.⁷⁶ In addition, they obviously dislike how the way she sits and talks emphasizes her sexy femininity. As a result of her bold conduct of her body and her politics, she is much talked about and with excitement. While some people believe that Lin Lizi will destroy the oppositional Party, others happily discuss the possibility of Lin Lizi having AIDS, infecting and destroying KMT by sleeping with all the important KMT politicians, and thus contributing greatly and easily to the new nation everybody else fight so hard for.

What people have not paid attention to is Lin Lizi's childhood in the countryside where she has lived with her grandmother. At the end of the story, Li Ang hints that Lin Lizi has been sexually assaulted one evening on her way home from school. It happens at the Village God Temple, which has a huge monstrous male god and other scary male gods, while the perpetrator is one of the carriers. This probably explains why Lin Lizi seems obsessed with the huge male god carried by men in the parade on the street. This is also the origin of her understanding of sex, power and the body. Sexual violence uses her body against herself and takes her power away, and now that she is a woman, she will use the exact body to take her power back.

The Unconstrained Woman therefore pays a great price for rebelling against the morals of sexuality in the oppositional camp. She is not accepted, and her love for Jiang Mingtai is not believed. She is constrained after all. She is not only a sex object in the eyes of other people, but she also functions as a sexual relief in the midst of the puritanical oppositional politics. All the sexual tension repressed by the politics of the Grieving Mother of the Nation and even the politics of the secret Lustful Widow is finally released in the incessant gossips about Lin Lizi, her dozens of cousins, and national politics.

At the end of "Beigang Incense Urn," Lin Lizi seems to realize her situation and she could be thinking about what to do next. Yet what should feminist critics do? He Chunrui from Central University offers an insight to the incident, arguing that sex and politics are "of course inseparable." In her short essay "'Incense Urn' Also Has a Right of Political Participation: Sex and Politics Are of Course Inseparable," she urges feminists to develop new theories and strategies in regard to the incident. According to

her, blaming it on “voyeurism of mass media” or arguing to “focus on female politician’s talents instead of body or sexuality,”

can not open up a larger space for women’s political participation, for they presumes a necessary and complete separation of politics from sex. However, political fields have changed greatly by the new environments created by mass media, and the continual trend to commodify male and female body makes politics and sex even more inseparable.⁷⁷

He Chunrui employs the political success of Kennedy and Ma Yingjiu⁷⁸ to illustrate that politicians’ look and sexual appeal play a significant role and that “body politics not only changes politics but enables women to turn from sexual objects into subjects.” Fully aware of the interplay of sexuality and politics and negative public opinions on sexual female politicians, He Chunrui suggests:

What we need to do is absolutely not to clarify that women do not participate in politics by sex, nor to question whether the mainstream society has treated fairly those female politicians who obtain power without using sex and their bodies, nor to trample on women who accumulate power with their bodies. What we really need to work hard on is to make sure that those women who participate in politics with their body and sexuality have the same support and legitimacy.⁷⁹

He Chunrui has uncovered a close connection between sex and politics, asserting that sexual equality must be pursued in order to achieve political equality. She thinks that a society that is open to women’s sexuality would not turn women’s own sexuality against themselves as they do now. Therefore, “to Lin Lizi who believes that “my sexuality is my politics” in the novel, her sexual liberation and her right of political participation are essentially the same.”⁸⁰

It is small wonder that in a society where sexuality works against women, women find themselves sexually commodified, morally judged and politically illegitimate, whatever image they assume. However different the Grieving Mother (of the Nation), the

Lustful Widow and the Unconstrained Woman may seem, they are fundamentally the same.

Conclusion

The Incense Urn Incident has opened up a world complicated by constant interplay between literature, literary history, capitalism, mass media, sex and power in contemporary Taiwan. More importantly, it shows the amazing and sometimes dangerous power of literary and cultural criticisms in the making and destruction of an author.

Just as her characters violate the public sense of moral values and are thus condemned, Li Ang the female author is controversialized for the reason that she does not play her card as expected. Faced with the more and more intensified commodification of the female body and sexuality, she does avoid the “frivolous” subject but presents “frivolity” in shocking detail. Sympathizing with oppositional movements, she exposes the dirty laundry everyone tries to hide. The many different interpretations of Li Ang’s *Beigang Incense Urn* reminds me of Lu Xun’s satirical comments on people’s reaction to women with short-sleeve blouses. Regarding some people’s accusation that women with short-sleeve blouses in public were immoral and indecent, Lu Xun pinpointed the real problem. The problem did not lie in the women with bare arms, but in those people who had immoral and indecent fantasies of women’s bare arms. Li Ang’s decency and indecency depends much on the criticisms, to which we feminist critics could not afford not to contribute.

Chapter 4 Li Bihua: Romanticizing the Nation

Li Bihua is one of the few Hong Kong authors that has a whole book of criticism devoted to her works, and the title is no other than “*Literary Hong Kong*” and *Li Bihua*.¹ Since “literary Hong Kong” is rather a new term, the title of this book suggests a sense of urgency and is also an attempt to construct a tradition of Hong Kong literature. In addition and perhaps more significantly, it defines a much important position for Li Bihua in contemporary Hong Kong literature, namely her pioneer role in the literary development of Hong Kong consciousness. Probing into such serious subjects as history, gender, national identity, and sexuality in her stories of legendary and often controversial women, Li Bihua has attracted a great deal of attention from various critics since the 1990s and has become a unique spectacle in Hong Kong literary and cultural studies.

However, Li Bihua’s position is rather awkward and under constant debate. While some critics accuse her of taking advantage of the system of capitalist cultural industry and consider her no more than one of the many popular novelists in Hong Kong, others regard her as a pioneer in shaping a Hong Kong literary and cultural identity at the turn of the century when the return to China overshadowed Hong Kong. However, even those cultural nationalists, who compliment Li Bihua for her significant contribution to an alternative Hong Kong narrative against the overwhelming China-centered literary and cultural discourses, have to point out apologetically that Li’s language is kind of “weak” (*danbo*).² Although women and sexuality are central to her works, few find her and/or her works feminist. As a result, instead of strengthening her space in Hong Kong literature, the controversy threatens to fix her in just a few sentences, if not completely wiping her out. Li Bihua is not a “legitimate” “serious writer” of “serious” Hong Kong literature, but

just a popular novelist who profits from low public tastes to which she caters. Just as Hong Kong, with its thriving popular culture, has had to fight against the title of “cultural desert,” Li Bihua must fight against her popularity.

The controversy of Li Bihua is essentially a debate on Hong Kong literature and culture. It is not just about whether Li Bihua as an author has written Hong Kong into literary history but about how Hong Kong literature is defined and delineated. What is interesting is the similarity between Li Bihua’s multiple cultural roles and the diversity of Hong Kong literature. While Hong Kong literature is marked by its combination of the high and the popular, particularly with its inclusion of martial-art fiction, romance, science fiction and “square essay,”³ Li Bihua’s field encompasses literature as a writer, film as a screenwriter, media as columnist and dance as the choreographer. The journey of Li Bihua seems suspiciously easy, from a popular novelist who supposedly caters to the low taste of the public, to a “new star” of literary and cultural critics who shoulders the responsibility to re-map a national literature. In fact, Li Bihua’s experience is not much different from that of contemporary Hong Kong that has been transformed, by itself and by critics, from a “cultural desert” to a unique culture with its unique history, past, present and future. Just as Hong Kong has had to “apologize” for its lack of seriousness as a result of an excess of the popular, Li Bihua has to defend (against) her own extreme popularity. Although Hong Kong today no longer has to debate on whether it has literature or not, Hong Kong literature will be greatly impacted by how Li Bihua’s controversy is interpreted. In other words, the outcome of Li Bihua’s popularity is a signal on how popular literature as a whole will be critically received, within the literary field of Hong Kong. Specifically, the Li Bihua controversy deals with the question

whether popular literature is an integral and important part of Hong Kong literature or it is just a complementary to its noble counterpart called “serious literature.”

The Li Bihua controversy is actually a theoretical controversy, a contest between critics of the Frankfurt school hostile to popular cultural industry and critics influenced by postmodern post-colonial cultural studies that consider the ordinary and the popular as a possible positive alternative to the often repressive China-centered nationalist discourses. It is one that Li Bihua is a popular novelist, for there are many other popular novelists in Hong Kong; but it is another that she is popular among “serious” and “elite” literary and cultural critics, who usually pay attention only to high culture. In this sense, the phenomenon of Li Bihua has consistently been a cultural production and reproduction by critics interested in popular culture (and in their own careers, of course).

Inspired yet unsatisfied by what I have read about Li Bihua, I argue in this chapter that Li Bihua’s controversy lies in the complexity of her works that could not be explained by binary literary and cultural criticisms that we have all been trained to do. As a result of binary thinking, the controversy in addition betrays an elitist bias held by most critics against the popular and its audience, as if the popular is absolutely conservative and the audience is necessarily dumb, when popular texts are inherently ambiguous with “semiotic excess” that enables different readers, under different social political and historical circumstances, to “make” different interpretations.⁴ As a result, it is important and necessary to decode the popular ambiguity in subversive and oppositional reading. Accentuating the significant role of cultural and literary criticisms in our understanding and production of Li Bihua as an author and a cultural producer, I argue that Li Bihua is read into being, and that the contradiction and ambiguity of her texts as well as the

diversity of her critic-readers have made a controversial Li Bihua inevitable. Exactly for the reason that Li Bihua may be read in a sexist, conservative structure that reinforces oppressive dominant discourses, it is more than necessary to “appropriate” her texts with feminist decoding that recognizes both revolutionariness and limitation in her texts.

In the following, I first situate Li Bihua in her specific social, political and cultural time and space, namely in the recently constructed framework of Hong Kong literature. Second, I sort out the different issues—national identity, literary history, history, Hong Kong consciousness, sexuality, etc.—presented by different arguments made on Li Bihua, and point out limitations of binary criticisms in interpreting and constructing Li Bihua, especially in constructing her popularity. Last, particularly dismayed by the lack of feminist critiques on Li Bihua, I intervene in the controversy with my own feminist reading of her two works, *The Reincarnation of the Golden Lotus* (1989) and *Kawashima Yoshiko* (or *The Last Princess of Manchuria*) (1990) and a feminist cultural and literary construction of Li Bihua as an author.

The Phenomenon of Li Bihua Success

The Li Bihua success is phenomenal in two aspects, creative as well as critical. In the first place, Li Bihua is a successful popular author since the 1980s. As an author in a rather expansive sense, she has swept the cultural market with her fiction, prose, essays, newspaper columns, journalist reports as well as films and ballets adapted from her best-selling novels. On the one hand, her novels are usually best-sellers that are reprinted many times, likely due to the fact that “her works has long been published by Heaven and Earth Books of Hong Kong, with unified and consistent packing design image.”⁵ On the

other hand, her works, especially her novels, have been culturally reproduced in the forms of film and ballet. In fact, Li Bihua is probably a Chinese writer who has the most works adapted to films, in which she is usually the screenplay writer. Most of the films are either box-office successes or international award winners, which in turn have made her already popular books even more popular.

Li Bihua's self-portrait seems to focus also on the popular side of her writing, emphasizing her achievements as a screenwriter and a columnist rather than as a novelist:

Li Bihua, born and growing up in Hong Kong, is a journalist (interview column), Television screenwriter, film screenwriter and ballet choreographer. Her film works include *Father and Son*, *Rouge*, *Farewell to My Concubine*, *The Reincarnation of the Golden Lotus*, *The Terracotta Warrior*, *Kawashima Yoshiko*, *The Temptation of the Monk* and *Green Snake*. A recipient of international awards, she considers those works spilled water and only hopes that the best is yet to be written.

Her columns and novels have been published on newspapers and magazines in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia, which have been compiled in over 50 books.⁶

On the other hand, the publisher's introduction of the author is in itself a combination of serious critique and playful comment:

Named "Gifted Woman with Unique Emotion (qiqing cainu)," Li Bihua is a well-known columnist on the literary stage of Hong Kong. She is extremely good at describing bloody romance and at rewriting controversial women of the past and the present, and is considered by critics a representative of "new feminist/feminine perspective." Films adapted from her novels include *Farewell to My Concubine*, *Rouge*, *Green Snake*, *The Terracotta Warrior*, *The Temptation of the Monk*, and so on. The combination of famous directors and actors, the special honor as a recipient of several international awards and gratifying box office records have rendered her worthy of the name of Filmic VIP. Today she ranks among the highest paid screenwriters and columnists, and her work becomes the super-yeast for the rise in rank of famous directors and actors.⁷

The publisher's note first defines Li Bihua as a spokeswoman for "new feminism," although it is up to the readers to interpret what "new feminism" means. Then it explains

that the real reason for her prominent celebrity status relies on the success of her films, crowded with famous directors and actors. Therefore, the value of Li Bihua does not lie in artistic accomplishment and experiments but in her market value. She is important not for the reason that she makes her readers think but that she generates money for others and for herself.

No doubt Li Bihua has made great achievements as a screenwriter for films adapted from her novels. For example, *Rouge* directed by Stanley Kwan won grand awards on the 10th Third-World Film Festival of France and Duling International Film Festival of Italy in 1988, and won the 1989 Best Picture on the 8th Hong Kong Film Award. *Farewell My Concubine* directed by Chen Kaige was awarded Golden Palm in the 1993 Cannes International Film Festival, attracting attention from critics all over the world, while *The Terracotta Warrior* was a great box-office success since it starred Gong Li, the No. 1 actress of China, and Zhang Yimou, the No. 1 director of China. The popularity of adapted films has often been part of the reprinting, with “film stills on its covers and inserts in order to attract consumers.” Sometimes there could be newly revised edition as a result of the film, such as *Farewell My Concubine*, whose 1985 original edition has 145 pages whereas the 1992 “new edition” contains 368 pages.⁸ Both *The Reincarnation of the Golden Lotus* and *Kawashima Yoshiko* the two novels of my choice for later interpretation, have their film versions, and recent publication of both novels, along with her other novels in the same collection, have included many film stills carefully captioned with lines not from the films but from the books. As a result, her novels and films promote sales of each other. While the filmic images of famous and even legendary actors and actresses attract the readers more to her books, the stories in

turn makes the readers wonder how and whether these famous actors and actresses have in the film versions captured changed or remained the same.

The close tie between Li Bihua's novels and films is also inherent in the texts. Often her language is short and simple, like that of screenplay. In fact, three of her novels—*The Reincarnation of the Golden Lotus*, *Kawashima Yoshiko* and *The Terracotta Warrior*—are “film novels,” according to Chen Yanxia:

Li Bihua first wrote the screenplays and then wrote them into novels. As a result, many scenes in her novels feel like filmic experiences. They cleverly employed filmic editing and shots: sprightly rhythms, strong images with carefully planned composition and color. Language and images permeates each other, embodying fully the multi-forms of production in cultural industry.⁹

Developing toward film may have pushed the sales of her books, but Li Bihua also uplifts herself and her works by venturing in the field of ballet, the widely accepted form of high culture. She has actively participated in the planning of *Rouge* and *Temptation of Monk* and other programs, with the involvement of other “serious” cultural organizations such as Hong Kong Orchestra, Hong Kong Modern Drama Troupe, etc., under the supervision of municipal administration.¹⁰ Consequently, Wong, Li and Chan place Li Bihua beyond the category of “popular novelists.” According to these critics,

in the present hierarchical framework of “high culture” vs. “popular culture,” she has surpassed the limitation of “popular novelists.” Although we think that her “language was weak” if approached from such categories as “writing style” and “diction,” she has surpassed in the eyes of her many readers quite a few other popular novelists in Hong Kong, especially the new generation of best-seller writers of “urban romance” like Zhang Xiaoxian.¹¹

Even with the success of her adapted films and Ballet, Li Bihua still strikes people as a “popular” author, who is simply more popular than other popular authors. It is her popularity among contemporary literary and cultural critics worldwide that makes the phenomenon spectacular. Suddenly she is not only commercially popular but also

culturally significant. If “ordinary” readers are attracted to her writing as a result of her monetary filmic success, “serious” critics are drawn by a different sense of fashionable package, namely, her exploration and representation of such critical issues as national identity, Hong Kong consciousness and sexual politics in the same texts. Many well-known critics since the 1990s have studied Li Bihua, reaching similar and opposite conclusions. Rey Chow of North America, Fujii Shozo of Japan, Ai Xiaoming of Mainland China, David D.W. Wang of Taiwan/North America, and Wong Wang-chi, Li Siu-leung, Chan Ching-kiu and K. K. Leonard Chen, to name but a few. Rey Chow and David D.W. Wang are recognized as two of the most influential critics on modern and contemporary Chinese (including Mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong) literature and culture, whereas Fujii Shozo is “the first Japanese scholar who concentrated on ‘literary Hong Kong’”¹² and Ai Xiaoming is also one of the authoritative figures in Hong Kong literature.¹³

The fact that Li Bihua is favored by literary and cultural critics has a lot to do with the rise of post-colonial studies and (particularly) cultural studies, and the emergence of Hong Kong literature as a subject of studies since the 1990s. If the Sino-British talk on Hong Kong of the early 1980s awakens people, especially Hong Kong residents, to a new Hong Kong belonging, these theories certainly provide the critics with some much needed vocabulary. While post-colonial studies accentuates the significance of nation building in a colonial and post-colonial context, it is the theory of cultural studies, with its critique on cultural hegemony, its emphasis on marginality and most of all, its celebration of popular culture, that proves most relevant and inspiring to the new field of studies on Hong Kong literature.

In his discussion of cultural studies as an academic discipline, Simon During points out the centrality of the concept of “hegemony,” which is used to “describe relations of domination which are not visible as such. It involves not coercion but consent on the part of the dominated (or ‘subaltern’).”¹⁴ While classic cultural studies emphasizes culture as “an apparatus within a system of domination,”¹⁵ in which “encoded” messages need to be decoded oppositionally, the new cultural studies has “[become] the voice of the other” and “the academic site for marginal/minority discourses.”¹⁶ Consequently, cultural studies now “celebrate[s] commercial culture” in “cultural populism” in opposition to monoculturalism and elitism, supported by the system of domination. Recognizing its challenge of cultural hierarchies, During also directs attention to the limitation of cultural populism. That is, it does not deal with the critical “question of co-option.” Using Fiske’s celebration of Madonna, During connects Madonna’s transgression to the music industry since “she helps keep the industry in business.” He argues that

It would help show how a “cultural populism” which can celebrate Madonna (whom the industry also loves) as transgressive is subtly, if unconsciously, connected to the promotion of market forces. This is not to say that Madonna is not an important agent in breaking down the barriers which organized the relation between the popular and the sexual as well as the popular and femininity, nor is it to say that entering cultural markets means co-option in any rigid or formal way. Indeed the expansion and differentiation of cultural markets have been tremendously fruitful in all kinds of ways—they are perhaps the major force that will keep cultural studies alive. But cultural populism requires a very nuanced account of the relations between cultural markets and cultural products, and between culture and politics, in order convincingly to celebrate (some) popular culture as “progressive.”¹⁷

During reminds cultural critics of the complexities of popular/mass/commercial culture, and his comment is illuminating for our understanding of Li Bihua’s controversial success. In fact, we can easily substitute “Li Bihua” for Madonna in the

above passage. In this sense, Li Bihua's critical significance is related to her commercial success, and like Madonna, Li's rewriting of Chinese literary tradition also "helps keep the industry in business." As a result, "a very nuanced account" of the Li Bihua success is required, which will recognize not only what cultural disruption she has contributed to but also what contradictions she is trying to negotiate within and outside her texts.

The critical significance of Li Bihua is closely connected to the critical significance of contemporary Hong Kong literature, the characteristic of which is its embrace of the popular. If we take into account of the fact that Hong Kong literature as a whole has only come into critical horizon in the past twenty years, the Li Bihua phenomenon is even more meaningful for its possible impact on how to define Hong Kong literature as a field of study. Li Bihua is no longer just an individual author who sells her words for a living, but she is a necessary, valuable and prominent component in the history of Hong Kong literary development.

Hong Kong Literature and Studies on Hong Kong Literature

The term Hong Kong literature was rather recent. As late as 1979, the debate in Hong Kong was still about whether Hong Kong had literature or not.¹⁸ Studies on Hong Kong literature started in the 1970s when Hong Kong literature began to develop its Hong Kong subjectivity and consciousness, and research and scholarship have flourished since the Sino-British negotiation on the future of Hong Kong in 1982. Nonetheless, Hong Kong literature was rather insignificant in comparison to either Mainland or Taiwan. It is said that no first-rate scholars in Mainland would venture into the field of Hong Kong literature. When Japanese scholar Fujii Shozo was invited to a workshop on

Hong Kong culture at Harvard in 1995, he inquired about Hong Kong culture to two Ph.D. students of modern Chinese literature, and both students were dubious: “Hong Kong? Culture?”

Yet studies on Hong Kong literature have continued to grow after all, particularly with the rise of cultural studies that take seriously popular culture, one of Hong Kong’s most distinctive defining features. Hong Kong literary studies have also been under the influence of post-modernist and post-colonial theories that focus on issues of nationalities, identities and interplay of power between center and margin. The coming and going of 1997, the year when Hong Kong was returned to China, as well as the turn of the new century and new millennium have prompted scholars worldwide to uncover, critique and document the history of Hong Kong literature and culture. Conferences on Hong Kong literature have been held, and there were even conferences dedicated to just one Hong Kong author, Jin Yong, whose martial-arts fiction has won the hearts and minds of Chinese readers all over the world. The question “whether Hong Kong has literature” is no longer relevant, and what is at issue is how to define Hong Kong literature, which is of great relevancy to Li Bihua.

One of the major features of Hong Kong literature is its “compatibility” or “diversity,” left or right politically, serious or popular aesthetically. Hong Kong had long been considered a “cultural desert.” As a British colony prioritizing commerce over culture, Hong Kong had been a marginal space for Chinese intellectuals. It was considered a transit for traveling people, a place to earn money to support families living at home in China. On the other hand, the long term “indifference” of British colonial government to cultural development, quite different from Japanese colonial control of

Taiwan, made it possible for “Chinese language and Chinese writing to continue to prevail” in Hong Kong. It provided a creative and critical space for Chinese writers, both left-wing and right-wing, seeking refuge during Anti-Japanese War (World War II) and the Civil War.¹⁹ Between Mid-1930s and late 1940s, more than two hundred writers fled south down to Hong Kong, including well established authors like Mao Dun, Dai Wangshu, Zhang Ailing (Eileen Chang), Xiao Hong, Xia Yan and so on.²⁰ As a result, the term “South-Coming Writers” was coined, referring to sojourner writers as opposed to resident writers. While Hong Kong literary stage seemed to be unusually lively, the fact was that these South-Coming Authors had never set their goal to develop Hong Kong literature. Hong Kong was only a space that allowed them to continue that anti-Japanese cultural resistance. As a result, although some of these authors finished their masterpieces here, their subject matters and settings were not on or in Hong Kong.²¹

The second-wave South Coming Authors since the late 1940s until the 1960s were similar and different. Many came here as temporary sojourners just like the first wave authors, only to find that they could not return home as a result of political turmoil that divided China into two hostile camps, the Mainland under the Communist government and Taiwan under the KMT Nationalist control. Again, Hong Kong became a battlefield between left-wing literature and right-wing writing, instead of developing its own literary tradition. However, a big difference was that many South Coming Authors dedicated to establishments of literary journals and magazines to train a new generation of Hong Kong writers.²² The increasing involvement of South Coming Authors with Hong Kong everyday life, and the emergence and growth of a new generation of young

native Hong Kong writers, are the major reasons that Huang Jichi considers the 1950s as the awakening years of Hong Kong literary subjectivity.²³

By the 1970s, with the soar of Hong Kong economy and improvement of social benefits such as “housing, medical care, education, and even protection of the working class,” Hong Kong consciousness, a sense of belonging to Hong Kong (although not necessarily in opposition to national identification with China), was engendered.²⁴ Likewise, Hong Kong authors devoted much energy to literary construction and representation of Hong Kong, the cosmopolitan culture different from both Mainland and Taiwan. The 1982 Sino-British negotiations on the future of Hong Kong intensified Hong Kong consciousness, and the final 1984 official declaration on Hong Kong’s return to China in 1997 brought forward particularly the issue of national belonging and cultural identities. Hong Kong, no longer a battlefield for either Mainland or Taiwan, has become a cultural space to imagine and construct its own past, present and future.

Li Bihua’s *Rouge* (*yanzhi kou*, 1985) is such a literary work that tells a story of Ruhua, a famous prostitute who committed suicide with her lover, Shier Shao (Master Twelve), as a result of his family’s objection to him marrying her. Shier Shao did not die then, and Ruhua the ghost fifty year later came back to search for him and only to find him old and wretched. It was with the help of Yuan Yongding, director of advertising department at a newspaper, and his girlfriend Ling Chujuan, an entertainment journalist, that Ruhua found Shier Shao. In the process of searching, Yuan, who failed history in the all Hong Kong middle school tests, was transformed into a cultural anthropologist uncovering a buried past that was Hong Kong.

Although Hong Kong literature has a history of over one hundred years, studies on Hong Kong literature are rather new. They started in the 1970s, steadily developed in the 1980s and flourished since the 1990s. Some critics like Lu Weiluan and Huang Jichi deem essential to construct literary traditions of Hong Kong, thus concentrating on material collection and compilation of uncovered works of the past. By 1999 they have worked together and published *Selected Works of New Literature in Early Hong Kong*, *Selected Resources of New Literature in Early Hong Kong*, *Selected Works by Hong Kong and South Coming Authors, the Civil War Period*, *Selected Resources for Hong Kong Literature, the Civil War Period*, *Selected Hong Kong Novels, 1948-1969* and *Selected Hong Kong Prose, 1948-1969*.²⁵ As a matter of fact, Lu Weiluan was “the first and the most serious scholar studying Hong Kong literature” and is one of the most authoritative figures in the historical re/construction of Hong Kong literature.²⁶ These books have managed to include works and resources from politically different camps (left, right and middle), and have dealt with rare and difficult issues such as “cultural traitors”—a term to describe those scholars/authors who were involved with the Japanese during the Japanese Occupation. Therefore, they are of great value to literary historians. Moreover, Lu and Huang’s research provides critics with alternative interpretations of South Coming Authors. Besides the point that the South Coming Authors’ activities in Hong Kong of the 1930s and 1940s were more “literary activities in Hong Kong” instead of “Hong Kong literary activities,” Lu and Huang further point out a connection between Hong Kong literary works and those in Mainland. Hoping that their books could be read side by side instead of in isolation, they argue that this type of reading would help “illustrate the circumstances and political conditions under which these works emerged”.

Since “many left-wing literary policies in Hong Kong during the Civil War influenced the directions of literature and arts later in Mainland China,” it would be interesting to compare Hong Kong literary works during this period with Mainland works published under similar policies. Perhaps studying the position of this Mainland literature in Chinese literary history would illuminate on where we place Hong Kong literature then, and this approach to literature would probably open up a new space for literary and cultural critics of “Chinese” literature.²⁷

On the other hand, other critics focus on literary and cultural criticisms that would give the new Hong Kong literature visibility as well as legitimacy. Huang Weiliang’s *First Exploration into Hong Kong Literature*, published in 1985, has been considered the first book-length literary and cultural criticism on Hong Kong literature.²⁸ In 1996 Huang published *Second Exploration into Hong Kong Literature*, along with Ye Si (Liang Bingjun) and Huang Kangxian who contributed to this cultural project with their own books of criticism on Hong Kong literature.²⁹ In addition, four books on Hong Kong literary history were published in Mainland between 1990 and 1997, and one of them was “the first book on the literary history of Hong Kong.”³⁰

The flourishing of literary and cultural criticisms on Hong Kong literature did not make disappear such questions as, “What is Hong Kong Literature?” and “Who are Hong Kong literary authors?” Instead, the different answers and approaches to these questions have rather accentuated the political significance of defining and delineating Hong Kong literary field, and have motivated many critics to engage in critical conversations with each other, exploring the many possible meanings of Hong Kong as a cultural space and Hong Kong literature as a unique form of cultural production.

It has been widely accepted that Hong Kong literature is extremely diversified although critics have different opinions on this literary diversity. Grand questions on whether works should be written or published in Hong Kong, or whether authors are Hong Kong residents legally, or whether works should be about Hong Kong are still under discussion. In defining Hong Kong writers, Huang Weiliang brings forward the idea of “Four Types:” native residents who write and became established locally; people who were not born but grew up locally and write and became established locally; people who neither was born nor grew up locally but write and became established locally; and people who were neither born nor grew up locally, had established themselves as writers in other places and then migrated to Hong Kong where they continue to write. Writers of the last category may or may not be considered Hong Kong writers. On the other hand, Liu Yichang defines Hong Kong writers as “those who either have Hong Kong resident card or have lived in Hong Kong for over seven years, have published at least one book of literary work or have often published on newspapers and magazines literary works including criticism and translation.”³¹ Chen Bingliang believes that “we don’t have to make it a rule that Hong Kong writers must be native Hong Kong residents. As long as they have lived in Hong Kong for a period of time, have written and published in Hong Kong, or have started a certain trend, we can call them Hong Kong writers.”³²

It might be relatively easy to decide on authors who moved to Hong Kong and write about Hong Kong. Take Shi Shuqing for example. She had been an established writer in Taiwan before she came to live in Hong Kong, working on her ambitious “Hong Kong Trilogy” that intends to uncover and reconstruct Hong Kong traditions. It seems that Shi is considered a Hong Kong writer as well as a Taiwanese writer, but the question

remains. If Shi Shuqing is included for writing about Hong Kong, why are other authors not included? Is the place of writing (Hong Kong vs. Mainland) the only reason that Shi Shuqing, who resides in Hong Kong, is a Hong Kong writer while Wang Anyi, the famous Chinese author who lives in Shanghai, is not? Does the place of writing determine that Wang Anyi's *Love and Romance in Hong Kong* (*xianggang de qing yu ai*) is not really a story about Hong Kong but only a tale about a Mainland-centered imagination and reflection on China via Hong Kong? On the other hand, could a Hong Kong author write something completely irrelevant to Hong Kong, characters or settings? Xixi, the established Hong Kong writer, published *Maria* (*ma li ya*), whose main characters are a French nun and a Costa Rican French soldier at a church hospital in Africa. Would it belong to Hong Kong literature? Can we explain this with the rather vague statement that it "reflects the thoughts and feelings" of Hong Kong writer Xixi? What about place of publication? In fact, both Xixi and Li Bihua have been (mistakenly?) considered as Taiwanese writers since both are published in Taiwan. What about people who grew up in Hong Kong but reside and published in another country?

The ultimate question is, what does it mean to Hong Kong and Hong Kong literature if we include some and exclude others? The different mappings of Hong Kong literature challenge the concept of nation as an "imagined community" within certain boundaries. Hong Kong as an imagined political and cultural community has most fluid and almost open borderlines, which on the other hand shows confidence of a new literary tradition in the making.

Questions on the Popular

If there are questions unresolved in the studies of Hong Kong literature and authors, there is a consensus: popular fiction is definitely included. The line between the serious and the popular or the left-wing and the right-wing, is not that irreconcilable. As a matter of fact, Huang Weiliang's *First Exploration into Hong Kong Literature*, the first scholarly studies on Hong Kong literature, includes romance, science fiction and martial arts fiction, all of which have long been ignored by literary and cultural critics. Huang explains that "both popular literature and refined literature are Hong Kong literature. Although they have different accomplishments, we must not ignore their existence. Critics should be tolerant and caring of Hong Kong literature, with more tolerant attitudes."³³ It seems that Huang's advice has been well taken, and the compatibility or coexistence of the serious and the popular is considered a unique characteristic of Hong Kong literature and literary studies.³⁴ However, similarities stop right here. Critics of different political, cultural and theoretical locations have read and will continue to read different meanings into popular fiction. Here I will discuss two major conflicts: Mainland-centered vs. Hong Kong-centered, and the popular viewed as positive alternatives vs. the popular viewed as conservative superficiality. Both conflicts are centered on the issue of national and cultural identities of Hong Kong and of China.

While it is (still) a norm, particularly on sensitive issues such as national sovereignty, for critics to interpret within the Communist-nationalist revolutionary framework (often to maintain their jobs and keep themselves out of political trouble), it is understandable that most Mainland critics situate Hong Kong literature within Chinese literature and regard Hong Kong literary history as a branch of Chinese literary history,

due to the economic, cultural and political tie that has never been completely cut off between Hong Kong and Mainland China. Hong Kong was China's territory before British colonial rule, it was during the British rule, and it is still is after it. To consider Hong Kong literature as an integral part of Chinese literature is to welcome it back to its root as well as to view Chinese literature from a new perspective. The presence of Hong Kong literature in Chinese literary studies does not necessarily result in the loss of Hong Kong identities, but it means rethinking Chineseness in relational terms between the Mainland and Hong Kong, although this approach to Hong Kong literature may voluntarily or involuntarily serve the "correct" revolutionary Party politics. As far as popular fiction is concerned, much attention was focused on their popularity in the Mainland market and how it has attracted Mainland readers with its difference from conventional revolutionary narratives. I do not object to such research; in fact I think it is helpful in understanding the complicated relationships between Mainland (motherland-neocolonizer) and Hong Kong.

On the other hand, to look at Hong Kong literature within the Mainland-centered Chinese framework is only partial, while to view Hong Kong literature only in this framework is rather arrogant. In order to resist the fate of being written, some critics have offered Hong Kong-centered interpretations of popular fiction. All the features that have ruined the name of popular fiction—trivial subjects, trivial lives and trivial goals—come back as an anti-hero hero against the overwhelmingly powerful grand narratives of an outside mother-state.

Although it is rather standard to discuss popular fiction under Hong Kong literature, popular fiction still generates heated debates on its effectiveness as possible

alternatives against grand narratives about Hong Kong. Some postmodern and post-colonial cultural critics are optimistic about the critical shift from the center of high culture to the margin of popular culture, which is presented as a space of negotiating and restructuring power relations. Others hold that popular culture is never meant to shoulder cultural, social or national responsibilities that are entrusted upon high culture, and that it is natural to find it in want of profundity since popular culture is essentially “superficial.”³⁵ These critics also point out that studies on popular culture is more about the critics and their political standpoints, instead of being about redefining “culture,” for the line between the serious and the popular is still maintained in academia.

In “Popular Culture and Historical Imagination: Thoughts on Li Bihua,” Chen Lifan offers insight into the status of popular culture in Hong Kong when discussing a collective “Hong Kong discourse” engendered as a result of concerns on Hong Kong’s cultural identities.³⁶ She first points out that this collective “Hong Kong discourse” in their “examination and reflections on Hong Kong’s history and culture, almost spontaneously focus their criticisms on popular culture.”³⁷ However, she argues that this trend is different from the existent studies of popular culture in Hong Kong since the 1960s and the 1970s although the significance of Hong Kong popular culture has long been recognized. She states,

It is necessary to note that popular culture, during the several years of sovereignty turnover, has suddenly become a favorite of cultural studies in academia. It does not just happen to be taken seriously, but besides the effects of a global atmosphere of cultural studies, Hong Kong’s own situation is of course the most important factor. This irresistible collective force of promoting studies of popular culture is really meaningful: it witnesses the academia arming themselves with studies of “popular culture” and resisting with narration and discourses against the two [Chinese and British] political and cultural hegemonies. Therefore, the status of “popular culture” is different now. It is not just one field of academic studies, but it has become, without

notice, a metaphor in Hong Kong academia: it embodies Hong Kong “nativism”(bentu). The popular culture of Hong Kong, after transformed into a space to produce meanings that refracts subjectivities, is entrusted with high expectations.³⁸

Popular culture is thus politically significant and culturally essential to Hong Kong identities in certain discourses of the academia. It is a weapon or tool for some critics against political and cultural hegemonies. While constructing a visible cultural national space for Hong Kong is the goal of many people, Chen also recognizes limitations of binary opposition that either deifies or demonizes popular culture.³⁹ Yet her indignation of the popularity of the popular culture among the academia also betrays her own practice of dualism, that of center/margin and high culture/popular culture. Interestingly, this sentiment against the popular does not limited to the status of popular culture in academia. Maybe more importantly, it is against “popular” theories of postmodern and/or postcolonial cultural studies, which have bestowed popular culture a stardom status and have thus prompted the debate on the political significance of popular culture in the first place. Just like popularity of popular culture brings profits instead of enlightenment, popularity of postmodern postcolonial theories of cultural studies produces academic jobs instead of serious dedicated critics. The pull of money and the necessity of making a living is the reality to a degree, and it is essential that literary and cultural critics keep the perspective of self-reflection. On the other hand, refusing to see positive sides of the popular is oversimplification resulted again from binary thinking.

Ella Shohat and Robert Stam have asked insightful questions on popular culture while betraying the binary nature of our thoughts:

Do we refer “popular” to the point of consumption: to the box office and Nielsen sense of culture consumed by the people? Or do we refer “popular” to its point of production, as culture produced by and for the people? The word

“culture” itself, as Raymond Williams warned us, also embeds ideological minefields. Do we mean it in the honorific sense of monuments and masterpieces, or in the anthropological sense of how people live their lives? And do we equate “popular culture” with mass culture, or at least see the former as subsumed into the latter, or do we see popular culture in the Latin American and Middle-Eastern sense as referring to non-hegemonic cultural production?

Shohat and Stam argue that mass culture and popular culture “are conceptually distinguishable but also mutually imbricated. Popular culture “evokes cultural studies optimism” and “the culture of ‘the people’ as a proleptic sign of inspirational cohesion and social transformation,” while mass culture “evokes Frankfurt School cultural pessimism” and “capitalist consumerism and the machine of commodification for which ‘the people’ are little more than an object of manipulation.”⁴⁰

In my opinion, Shohat and Stam fall into the trap of binarism, failing to see the complexities of either mass culture or popular culture. Instead of separating them in neatly defined positive or negative category, I see the two terms interchangeable and having both positive and negative potentials and compromises. Under certain circumstances, popular culture can actively resist the hegemony of authoritarian state, precisely because of its access to the masses as a result of “mechanical reproduction,” an optimistic term for Walter Benjamin. According to Benjamin, “mechanical reproduction” blurs the hierarchical distinction between authors and mass audiences, between high art and realities. It thus frees mass audience from the “aura” of the work of art. Instead of being “absorbed” by the “aura” of the original piece of artwork, “the distracted mass absorbs the work of art.”⁴¹ In other words, the masses in their search for entertainment rather than artistic enlightenment are “distracted,” rather than “concentrated” in their attitude towards art, and therefore can actually act independently as critics of works of

art. Distraction resists control, and it is in this sense that popular culture, promoted by “mechanical reproduction,” is subversive: “The Public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one.”⁴²

While absent-mindedness can resist control, it can also mean losing control, as presented by Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer. In their discussion of “cultural industry,” they argue against mass reproduction, which they believe replaces individuality with quasi-individuality. Mass culture is formulaic and “uniform,” and differences are only superficial. “Furthered by mechanical reproduction,” works of art lose its critical independence but become “imitation” of realities, “leav[ing] no room for imagination or reflection on the part of the audience” and thus showing “obedience to the social hierarchy.”⁴³ In this case, the popular mass culture willingly compromises with or support the authoritarian discourses.

Popular culture is multifaceted, and what popular culture means or can mean is determined in the decoding and encoding of literary and cultural critics. Often it contradicts itself, and it is necessary that critics should acknowledge this internal contradiction. Part of the complicated popular culture, the meanings of Li Bihua and Li Bihua’s popular fiction are also discursively produced.

The Popular Controversy: A Debate on Li Bihua

The debate on Li Bihua is a major part of the debate on popular culture in Hong Kong since Li, being hyper-visible due to great popularity of her popular fiction and films, is often chosen as an object of analysis. On the one hand, most of the discussions focus on the issue of national and cultural identities, prompted both by a global trend of

postmodern postcolonial cultural studies and by Hong Kong's own identity crisis as a result of power turnover at the end of last century. On the other hand, in contrast to controversies on the other three authors in previous chapters, the absence of strong feminist criticisms is striking, especially if we consider the fact that Li Bihua is a woman author who mostly writes about and rewrites women and women's sexuality. The lack of gender analysis shows the continuation of a male-centered tradition in critical theory, however subversive and popular it may be.

A dominant oppositional interpretation on Li Bihua is that she "writes from the margin into the center," from Hong Kong into Mainland-centered China. Rewriting well-known and/or controversial female characters of classical Chinese literature, Li Bihua, in the eye of critics, constructs a narrative of "little Hong Kong" (xiao xianggang) against the hegemonic discourse of "greater China (da zhongguo)." While the original stories have nothing to do with Hong Kong, Li Bihua "deliberately or unconsciously involves Hong Kong" in many of her works, "uttering potentially subversive destabilizing factors into the structure of a 'stable center.'"⁴⁴ Although her main characters grow up in Mainland China, they somehow end up in Hong Kong.

Farewell to My Concubine is an epic story about the traumatic experience of two Peking Opera actors and a prostitute, spanning more than half of the twentieth-century through the Nationalist Revolution, the Anti-Japanese War, the Civil War and the Cultural Revolution. The original opera has nothing to do with Hong Kong. It is a famous tale of a defeated XiangYu, King of Chu, in the bid for the ultimate power in China. He made his farewell to his favorite concubine, who killed herself to show her loyalty. Although he escaped the enemy's siege, he refused to cross the Yangtze River for his life.

He could not forgive himself for letting down his supporters, and committed suicide with his sword in order to redeem himself. In Li Bihua's story, Duan Xiaolou, the actor who plays King of Chu, have also gone through trials and tribulation. Like King of Chu, he perseveres but eventually accepts his defeat. Unlike King of Chu, however, Duan Xiaolou "didn't slice his throat with his sword [like what the original character did after being defeated]. He didn't die for his country. For, this 'country' didn't want him." Instead, he fled to Hong Kong without hesitation.⁴⁵ Patriotism is mocked in practicality and playfulness.

Pan Jinlian, or *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus*, retells the story of Pan Jinlian, the infamous adulterous murderous whore of classic Chinese literature. While she got what she "deserved" being killed by a morally "superior" masculinist man (whom Pan tried yet failed to seduce) in the space of China, Shan Yulian, the incarnation of Pan Jinlian, left for Hong Kong in the end. She is not destroyed by her traumatic experiences such as rape, aborted romance and personal humiliation, but she ends up happily married ever after, completely cleansed of the stigma of a notorious adulteress. As Li Bihua explains, "It was not that she didn't love her motherland, but her golden years had already gone. She couldn't pick it up or look back on it. She had no choice but to open up a space for the immediate new life [in Hong Kong]."⁴⁶

Hong Kong is no longer a space that is marginal to the Mainland center. It is as legitimate as the Mainland, and may be even better. For, Hong Kong provides a positive alternative political and cultural space for the characters, and at the same time it functions as a critique of the center.

Li Bihua's challenge of exclusive definition of national identities is most evident in *Kawashima Yoshiko*. The real Kawashima Yoshiko was shot to death after convicted of being a national traitor during the Anti-Japanese War. Yet her identity was not that clear in Li Bihua's book. As Wong, Li & Chan argue, she was confused, if not completely lost, in her floating between the triple identities that she had: Manchurian, Japanese and Chinese. She was born Xianzi as a Manchurian princess, became Kawashima Yoshiko at age seven when she was taken to Japan, with the mission to revive the lost empire of Manchuria. When she came back to China with Japanese army, she was Jin Dehui, a well-known military commander. Although later identity conflicts were reduced to between the Chinese and the Japanese as Wong, Li & Chan point out, her desperate refusal to be defined by authoritative discourses is clear in her screams, "I'm not Japanese/I'm Chinese" or "I'm not Chinese/I'm Japanese." With the absence of Hong Kong as an alternative space, her quest to define herself ended with her death. On the other hand, Li Bihua's now classic, *Rouge*, situates in center Hong Kong's newly discovered past, which is considered, in the words of Rey Chow, "an alternative time to fabricate and imagine a 'new society' so as to solve the identity crisis in today's Hong Kong."⁴⁷

The interesting thing is that negative reviews of Li Bihua are as confident and passionate as positive readings. Li Bihua here is presented as a cultural clown and a shameless opportunist profiting from capitalist cultural industry, never meant to carry the torch to fight for alternatives against dominant discourses. In fact, superficiality is her trademark. Chen Lifan thus portrays the image of Li Bihua,

She would write a novel, easily one after another, with shocking speed. Besides entertaining others and herself, she gets both fame and wealth. At present by chance of luck, she is just in time for the heated debates on cultural identities, thus suddenly changing herself into a new star surrounded by many critics at academic conferences.⁴⁸

Therefore, the image of a heroic cultural rebel is simply a product of critics and some trendy theories, for Li's superficiality is exactly what postmodernists are looking for in protest against "grand narratives of classic literature, history, nationality, etc."⁴⁹ Instead of challenging any existing system of unequal power, Li Bihua "depends" on and take advantage of them as much as possible in order to sell, for, "under the circumstances in which anything could be packed as commodity and be sold, no concept (including cultural identity) is too sacred to be sold."⁵⁰ The question is then not on whether Li Bihua tries to write Hong Kong into history but on how the written Hong Kong history is being advertised and sold. In fact, Chen readily admits Li Bihua's Hong Kong consciousness. Hong Kong consciousness is not just a self-reflective sense of national belonging but becomes more a fashionable and popular commodity, which everybody, high or low, is fascinated with and is only eager to own and consume so as to prove one's own market value, as shown in the case of Li Bihua. Hong Kong consciousness, along with other terms and concept such as identity, history and nostalgia, is exactly what promotes the sale of Li Bihua's books. Li Bihua thus does nothing but to utilize and confirm dominant capitalist system of cultural production and conservative nationalist sentiments. In her representation of the instability of national and cultural identities, in *Kawashima Yoshiko*, for example, critics argue that she actually wishes for its stability instead of venturing into a new land of identity that is outside the oppressive system.

I find arguments on both sides insightful, providing us information on the same Li Bihua from different perspectives and critical lens and thus producing and reproducing through conferences and publications extremely different Li Bihuas. As a matter of fact, the Li Bihua's are almost exactly the opposites. In their struggle against the either/or binary arguments, they have done exactly what they accuse others of doing. Li Bihua is either a hero (yinxiong) or a coward (gouxiong), either a rebel or a conformist, either a pioneer or an opportunist. She either "writes the margin into the center" or sells both margin and center; and she either challenges the concept of national identity or is very much part of it.

In the debate on Li Bihua, the discourse of the nation definitely overshadows the lip-service exploration on gender and sexuality. In fact, gender and sexuality are almost an after-thought, which I believe results from a still marginalized feminist criticism within critical theory, despite successful establishment of women's studies at universities. However, a few critics have approached Li Bihua from different perspectives. For example, David D.W. Wang puts Li Bihua in the hundreds of years of the tradition of Ghost Fiction in classic Chinese literature.⁵¹ Ghost Fiction at the time was considered bad taste among established scholars, particularly for its popularity among ordinary people. But now the stories are part of the Chinese literary canon. In fact, some critics remind readers of the unstable meaning of the term "popular literature," since all four must-read Chinese classics—*Journey to the West*, *Romance of Water Swamp*, *Romance of the Three Kingdom*, and *Dream of the Red Chamber*—were so-called low popular fiction of their own times.⁵² In a way, Wang's analogy raises Li Bihua to a canonical status.

Love and romance are another topic explored by critics. While David D.W. Wang compares Li Bihua's theme of love with her own complicated "love affair" with Mainland China, the Mainland critic Ai Xiaoming deals with how Li Bihua rewrites classic love stories and how love triangles—heterosexual or homosexual—are presented differently. In her discussion of *The Reincarnation of the Golden Lotus*, she briefly deals with Shan Yulian/Pan Jinlian's cycle of sexist and sexual oppression. She argues that the reason that Shan Yulian seems to repeat Pan Jinlian's fate is Shan's memory of Pan's life. Therefore, Ai Xiaoming asserts that her loss of that memory at the end is "a protest" to the recycled life that always makes her a sexual object in male gaze. Yet she also admits that Li Bihua is not a "radical feminist," although she is clearly sympathetic with women's fate and satirical about love. She points out that Li Bihua's rewriting of classic Chinese literary texts is also limited by the original texts. She also argues that Li Bihua's Hong Kong as an alternative space is not really better than the mainland (the original) although she seems to imply a "happily-ever-after" ending without probing into the relationship between Shan Yulian and her Hong Kong husband Wu Ruda.

Interestingly, most critics of different sides seem to reach another agreement on Li Bihua, along the line of "weakness." This time it is not her language but the female characters in her stories. In the words of Li Siu-liang, "Obviously Li Bihua as a woman writer often takes women as her subject. Ironically, her female characters do not necessarily have female subjectivity, nor do they attack or subvert the existing male center as well as male/female binary gender consciousness. Instead, they often appear to strengthen existing patriarchal systems."⁵³ Despite being impressed with Li Bihua's sophisticated reflection on the issue of national identity, Wong, Li & Chan argues that

Kawashima Yoshiko, like Li Bihua's other novels, "displays the author's conservative attitude toward gender, sex orientation and sexuality," and that the novel "is full of witty epigrams that consolidate stereotypes of women and male/female relationships." They cite one such epigram to illustrate their point: "Women are popular because men flatter them, women are bad because men dote on them—maybe only without men can women be at peace." In addition, the critics assert that Kawashima Yoshiko as a transvestite is superficial and she does not disrupt patriarchal systems but possesses "the shortcoming of stereotypical women, which is jealousy."⁵⁴

Chen Yanxia confirms that Li Bihua limits a potentially feminist text to a conservative novel that strengthens "masculinity" over femininity. For example, when she was raped by her stepfather, she did not think about fighting against sexual violence encouraged by oppressive gender hierarchy. Instead, she cuts her hair short and decides to say good-bye to being a woman, "further belittling and negating women."⁵⁵ On the other hand, the tragedy of *Kawashima Yoshiko* is not that she questions the concept of nationality because of her double identities but that her rather conservative sense of national belonging is misplaced. Her tragedy is that she "has a home that she can't return." Japan does not want her and China decides to shoot her for being a national traitor. In Chen Yanxia's words, she, like Hong Kong, "is nobody but an unfortunate woman waiting anxiously for the acceptance of her fatherland."⁵⁶

Although Fijii Shozo disagrees with Li Siu-leung's statement on Li Bihua's conservative position on gender and sexuality, his defense is rather general without detailed textual analysis. In response to Li Siu-liang's assertion that Li Bihua's female characters "depend on the other [men]" in order to exist, Fijii just points out that the

existence of men in her novels is under similar constraint and that they have their own webs of dependence, especially on those with more political, social and cultural power.⁵⁷ He positions, in passing, Kawashima Yoshiko as gender-neutral in his comparison of Li Bihua's *Kawashima Yoshiko* and a 1984 biography of Kawashima Yoshiko by a Japanese author. In addition, he does not elaborate at all how the female character in *The Reincarnation of the Golden Lotus* "vacillates between two individualities: 'Shan Yulian as a modern woman and Pan Jinlian as a heroine in a Ming novel'" although I agree that the main character Shan Yulian/Pan Jinlian is destroyed in feudalist China as well as socialist China.⁵⁸

Romanticizing the National Space

In his analysis of "love and romance" in Hong Kong literature, David Der-wei Wang interestingly says that "Hong Kong's literary history is Hong Kong's romantic history," "a history of the loss and pursuit of love. Because of the lack of love, it desires; and because of its desire, it is frustrated."⁵⁹ Hong Kong's love and romance are only a proof of its lack of love, and its romance is rather narcissistic for it is between Hong Kong itself. However, Wang argues that it is in this self-love Hong Kong's subjectivity is developed.

Love/romance is indeed central to Li Bihua's fiction, in which Li Bihua's ambivalence is evident. On the one hand, she seems to accept the male-centered hierarchy between masculine ambition and feminine romance; and yet on the other, love/romance *is* the ultimate ambition for her characters and for herself as an author. Li Bihua is both a romanticist and a pessimist. She could not resist temptation of patriarchal

romance, a fantasy of her female characters. At the same time she realizes romantic impossibility, thus deconstructing that romantic fantasy.

No other works of Li Bihua than *Kawashima Yoshiko* and *The Reincarnation of the Golden Lotus* have portrayed a better picture of Li Bihua's own ambivalence toward love/romance. These two novels vividly present contradictions between women, love, desire and the nation. Li Bihua's female characters desire romance, and women with desires are dangerous although the romance they desire may be old-fashioned.

Paradoxically for Li Bihua, romance shows both women's submission *and* resistance to nationalist discourses, and it is in love that women's subjectivity is independent of nationalist discipline. It is love/romance, not Hong Kong, that provides an alternative space for women.

Instead of paying lip-service to fashionable terms like nationality and cultural identities, Li Bihua struggles between her own desire for a modern independent woman and her search for an alternative national space that truly welcomes women's independence. Not at all a typical shallow popular novelist as some suggest, Li Bihua is a disillusioned romantic and sometimes feminist author: on the one hand, Kawashima Yoshiko is shot to death for being a traitor venturing out to a different cultural and national space; and on the other hand, Shan Yulian/Pan Jinlian, marrying Wu Ruda/Wu Da and losing her memory of oppression and revenge, becomes completely domesticated angel to her Hong Kong husband. Hong Kong as an alternative space for Shan Yulian disciplines and domesticates her, just like her previous life Pan Jinlian who is eventually killed. While Li Bihua successfully questions a Mainland-centered Chinese national identity, she tells us that the alternative Hong Kong is a continuation of thousands of

years of sexual repression of women, with a simple change of location. In a word, nationalist sentiments, however subversive they may sound against the old model, are not to be trusted from a woman's point of view. The only way out—for women and men—is to romanticize the national space.

To discuss Li Bihua as a popular novelist and Hong Kong author, I find it necessary to include the film versions of these two stories. First of all, Li Bihua's popularity is closely connected to films adapted from her books, and the comparison of both versions will give us a deeper understanding of Li Bihua's popularity. Secondly, Hong Kong culture is mostly popular culture, a significant part of which is film industry. Li Bihua expands from literature to film, and is a perfect example of Hong Kong author since Hong Kong literature is a perfect combination of high culture and popular culture. Like many other critics, I do not limit my interpretation exclusively to her novels, but acknowledge the fact that Li's novels are influenced to a certain degree by the films based on them. For example, the new editions published after the films were made often had film stills on the cover or as inserts. Wong, Li & Chan even point out major addition of pages in the case of *Farewell to My Concubine*, besides colorful pictures from the film. Of course, it can be argued that those adapted films, even with Li Bihua as their co/screenplay writer, cannot be considered as Li Bihua's works but that the films are simply an interpretative filmic production of Li Bihua by different directors. However, Li Bihua herself has certainly participated in the filmic production and transformation of herself as an author. In this sense, it is more meaningful to compare Li Bihua's novels with the corresponding films, seeing how Li Bihua herself negotiates her desire for love/romance in the intricate relations between women, sexuality and nation.

Kawashima Yoshiko tells a tragic journey of a legendary spy with triple identities: the Japanese Kawashima Yoshiko, or the Manchurian Princess Xianzi, or the Chinese Commander Jin Dehui. At age seven she is sent by her father to Japan to be the stepdaughter of Kawashima, a Japanese who has persuaded her father to work together so as to revive the lost Qing empire while his real intention is to set up a puppet government under his control. In order to make her a full devotee to his plan, Kawashima rapes her when she is a teenager whose dream is no other than marrying the man she loves. From then on, Yoshiko sterilizes herself, says good-bye to love and romance and starts to use her body in exchange for military and political power. Often dressed like a man with the nickname of “beauty in male suit,” she becomes a military commander in charge of five thousand soldiers. In her ambitious quest for the lost Qing dynasty, she has used and has ultimately been used by Japanese military commanders in the Japanese invasion and occupation of China during the 1930s and 1940s. In the end she is sentenced to death as a national traitor, although rumor has it that someone else is killed in her stead and that she later escapes to Japan.

The Reincarnation of the Golden Lotus is also a story about another notorious woman. The only difference is that Yoshiko is real while Pan Jinlian is purely fictional. Pan Jinlian is a female character in two Chinese classic literary texts, *Shuihu Zhuan* and *Jin Pingmei*. Pan Jinlian is one of the concubines of a landlord, Zhang Dahu, who rapes her and then gives her for free to Wu Da, a dwarf and the most ugly man of the town. She is soon seduced by Ximen Qing, a playboy of the town. When Wu Da’s brother Wu Song comes to visit, Pan is attracted to the strong “masculine” man who without hesitation

rejects her. Instigated by a pimp figure, Pan murders her husband, only to be killed by Wu Song, the man she falls in love with. Determined to revenge and thus refusing to drink the soup of memory loss on her way to reincarnation, she finds herself in the middle of China's political turmoil—the Cultural Revolution, and her name is Shan Yulian, a ballet dancer who is to repeat and revise her previous life. She is first raped by her supervisor Zhang (whose family name pronounces the same with Zhang Dahu). She then falls in love with Wu Long, who under political pressure slaps her in public. After the Cultural Revolution, she meets Wu Ruda, a short and rather absurd Hong Kong businessman, and marries him. Living in Hong Kong, she begins an affair with a fashion designer, Simon (a name with similar pronunciation to Ximen, seducer of Pan Jinlian) and Wu Ruda's cousin, Wu Long, the same man who has humiliated her. In the end, Wu Long is killed in a car accident, Simon becomes impotent, and Shan Yulian loses her memory. Thus her revenge ends, and her life with her husband really begins.

If Li Bihua's novel is "a political allegory of power relations of control/resistance and hegemonic coercion/attempted transformation between Hong Kong and Mainland,"⁶⁰ these two books then seem to offer a clear solution. The apparently happy-ever-after marital life of Shan Yulian in Hong Kong, in contrast to the tragic death (at least assumed death) of Yoshiko in China, represents Li Bihua's evident preference of Hong Kong as a home to return while extremely critical of China as a closed brutal national and cultural space. In the words of Wong, Li & Chan, "Mainland China repeats oppression and violence while Hong Kong is an unknown, open space with the possibility to 'develop the immediate new life' and to revenge (changing the written history and reality). Hong

Kong is a location to rewrite fate and rewrite history as well as a space to rewrite tradition (stories, narrations).”⁶¹

Li Bihua in the first place challenges the assumed fixed nature of national identity in *Kawashima Yoshiko*, in which the main female character identifies with three nationalities, Japanese, Chinese and Manchurian, although she seems to reinforce its essentiality at times. When Princess Xianzi finds out that her father has decided to send her to Japan with Kawashima, her scream, “I’m not a Japanese!...I’m a Chinese!...I don’t want to go to Japan!” evidently demonstrates her clear identification with China.⁶² During the Japanese invasion in China during the 1930s, Yoshiko, her new name, is teased and harassed at school by Japanese kids practicing the game of killing the Chinese. The question is always, “Where is your hometown? China?...Japan?” Yoshiko’s answer that her home was “in Mother’s belly” is not simply a smart answer but her romanticizing a sense of national belonging—just like a baby to her mother. At the end of the story when she is waiting in prison for her death, she argues that she is in fact a Japanese and should not be punished as a national traitor of China. Although her identification with China or with Japan seems to be mutually exclusive and that she sometimes equates Manchuria with China, she fundamentally violates the law of exclusive nationality precisely because she, for a limited time, believes that she could choose either one of the three national identities. She is a Japanese before the Japanese military authorities; then she is a Manchurian when she applauds for the establishment of the Manchuria, although a puppet regime. Then she is both a Manchurian and a Chinese using Japan to achieve her goal when she is verbally attacked by Yunkai, an opera actor whose passion and

bravery attract her. Floating in between these identities, she becomes a legendary powerful figure, at least for a while when she is useful for the Japanese and Manchurian. However, Yoshiko is finally scheduled to die, exactly for the reason that nationality is non-negotiable.

Li Bihua's critique on nationalism and national identity is centered on women, particularly on the tension between women's desires and the nation's expectations as well as punishments. Li Bihua's story of Yoshiko exposes essentially exclusive nationalist identity politics that demand and even force sacrifice from and upon people, particularly women. All the three nations she identifies with have failed her and violated her. Her father, in the name of Manchuria, sends her away as if she is some kind of gift or object, to a strange land, not caring about what she has to go through. Her stepfather, in the name of Japan, rapes her at a young age so that she would not be distracted by her desire for love, which is not at all a part of his plan. Acceptance as a Japanese for her means that she has to give all, including and particularly her alien body as she is not born Japanese. Her sexual relations with the Japanese in this sense are inevitable since she has to constantly prove to those in power that she belongs to Japan, although she does get some power in return. When Japan is defeated finally with the end of World War II, Yoshiko finds herself "having home but couldn't return." ("youjia buneng hui")⁶³ She might think that she has three homes, but Manchuria is nowhere to be found, and despite years of service as well as (sexual) allegiance to the Japanese, Kawashima—Japan—is not willing to provide her with any document to prove that she is a Japanese to save her life. In fact, Japan once wants her dead for her second drifting away from complete allegiance when she insists rescuing Yunkai, an anti-Japanese opera actor she falls in love with

although he tries to assassinate her. On the other hand, exasperated by her treacherous traveling between the nations instead of pledging sole allegiance to China, China decides to destroy her body with death. Like Li Bihua says, she is “a woman tricked by fate and war, a puppet, like a wandering lonely soul, abandoned like worn-out shoes.”⁶⁴

While official notion of nationalist discourse does not tolerate Yoshiko’s multiple identities, Li Bihua, obviously sympathetic with Yoshiko, arranges a secret escape, which is no other than love/romance. In fact, the whole story is about “the loss and pursuit of romance.” Her loss of love motivates her to obtain as much power as possible, but she is nothing but a pawn to both the Japanese and the Manchurians. Without love/romance, she does not have real power. Although she is known as a military commander, nobody takes her seriously and her troop eventually ceases to exist. She is like a new toy for the powerful Japanese men, just like what she is to her stepfather when she is young. Although she tries to steal or seduce some power from powerful Japanese, her body is only a tool to be used by her and above all by powerful Japanese men. In other words, her power does not come from herself but is given to her as an exchange, which can be taken away at any time. In addition, her life does not belong to her either. Although she believes she can cross national borders as a result of her experience, the fact is that she does not really have freedom of choice. The one-time exercise of her freedom of choice earns her death order, and it is no surprise that she is ordered to death in the end by the Chinese court. On the question of national allegiance, the two enemy nations, with the same nationalistic discourse, finally reaches an agreement.

It is only in love/romance that Yoshiko finds her true power, independent from nationalist discourses. Admitted, it can be argued that Yoshiko loses herself and her

ambition to romance, being emotionally dependent on the man she loves. For example, she wants nothing but to be a wife who enjoys cooking for her future husband when she is younger before the rape. It seems that her freedom from Japanese imperialist and nationalist discursive control has much to do with her domestication. However, it is not that simple. When she is ordered to be killed by her Japanese ex-lover, she survives only as a result of love/romance. The romance between them or the memory of it gives them enough power to free themselves from the inevitable death order, and that power of freedom rewards her with life although her ex-lover is punished for his betrayal of nationalistic calling.

The power of love/romance is most evident in her relationship with Yunkai, the opera actor who turns into an anti-Japanese fighter. When Yunkai is arrested and tortured for participating assassination of Yoshiko and other Japanese officers, Yoshiko risks her life, rescues him and finally sets him free. She has not saved him because of their shared Chinese nationality, although national identity certainly is what they are arguing about. When Yunkai points out that she kills Chinese people, she states that this sacrifice is justified for reviving a lost empire. She says to Yunkai, "I've never for a minute forgotten that I'm a descendant of the Qing Dynasty, and a Chinese! I am on the same side with you, and we should cooperate with each other."⁶⁵ However, nationalist discourses, Japanese or Chinese, do not tolerate independent minds. Being Chinese has not freed her from the Japanese rule to kill resistance fighters, but being in love gives her power to let Yunkai go, defying Japanese control. Likewise, Yunkai's love for her creates a distance from Chinese nationalism and enables him to help her escape in the end. Yunkai tells her,

“...Don’t worry, and I’ll take care of everything—I’m here to pay you back with a life!”

Pay her back with a life? Of course, her gun had pointed at him, but after all, it only touched his hair. She really could have killed him, but decided to let him go.

Suddenly he appeared on her way to death.

...

Yunkai held her hand, secretly but tightly.

...

Yunkai squeezed her hand with all his strength, his knuckles turning white. She was hurt from her hand to her heart.

Neither said that “serious word,” but they both understood. All that was to be said but wasn’t said was solidified into this squeeze. Soon, they had to let go.⁶⁶

Love/romance deconstructs nationalist constriction and becomes a space that allows life to independent transgressors. Nationalist discourses are criticized more strongly in the film version, and love/romance is more obvious between Yunkai and Yoshiko. If Yunkai at first stubbornly keeps a distinctive line between him as a Chinese and her as a Japanese who kills Chinese, his nationalist sentiment has been turned into its opposite. Instead of identifying with nationalist desire to punish Yoshiko, he says, “I don’t know a lot of things. All I know is I don’t want you to die.” Here repressive nationalist space is replaced by personal emotions of love/romance, which gives the audience a sense of hope for humanities.

If Li Bihua in *Kawashima Yoshiko* tells us that nationalist discourse in general objectifies women and women’s body, she further elaborates it in *The Reincarnation of the Golden Lotus*, an attempt to rewrite and create an alternative national and cultural space that will make sure that misogynistic history will not repeat. By emigrating Shan Yulian from Mainland China to Hong Kong, Li Bihua “writes” Hong Kong into the Mainland-centered Chinese nationalist discourse that, in its celebration of the hundred

years of colonial humiliation, almost completely discounts Hong Kong's own unique experiences as the colonized. Many critics assert that Hong Kong as a new space is full of promises for Shan Yulian and her husband, who finally have "happily-ever-after (tian chang di jiu)."⁶⁷ However, I argue that the reason that Shan Yulian can live "happily ever after" with Wu Ruda, her husband, is that she is fully tamed and domesticated. Without memories of oppression and violence, she is no danger to the new patriarch—Wu Ruda. Therefore, it is not necessary to kill her as it was for Pan Jinlian hundreds of years ago. Hong Kong, for a woman like Shan Yulian, is not that different.

Sexual allegiance of women to the nation is also important in *The Reincarnation of the Golden Lotus*. Shan Yulian, the incarnation of Pan Jinlian, is a ballerina who is to perform *The White Hair Girl*, a revolutionary model opera that has gone through many changes. Xi'er, the heroine of *The White Hair Girl*, is pregnant as a result of rape by the landlord, who is also responsible for the death of her father. She is even considering being the concubine of the landlord until she finds out that he plans to kill her after the birth of her child. This is how Xi'er turns to revolution in the first edition of the play. However, this version of Xi'er's experience completely violates the rules for literature and arts of the time, which requires a spotless body to be devoted to revolution. To save Xi'er and revolution from embarrassment of the corrupted female body, the final version omits rape and pregnancy. Likewise, Shan Yulian, the dancer who plays Xi'er, needs to be just as pure and as willing to serve the revolution. Director Zhang of the Dance Academy demands in the name of revolution that Shan Yulian devote her body to him. Shan is eventually raped, just like what has happened to Pan Jinlian in the past. It is very symbolic that the sexual assault takes place "among the sea of desire, surrounded by red

flags and badges of Chairman Mao.”⁶⁸ The passion for Communist nationalist revolution is violence against the female body.

However, the nationalist demand for devotion of the female body is sometimes disrupted because of Shan Yulian’s memory of her past life. In Li Bihua’s words, “She is a modern woman, and how could she let tragedy repeat itself?”⁶⁹ Thus she fights back, hitting Zhang’s lower body and symbolically damaging the Phallus, with nothing but a sculpture (of Chairman Mao). This severe sacrilege and sarcasm of Communist revolution is unfortunately revised in the film, showing perhaps self-censorship in the effort to attract more audience and more profit. Thus, Shan Yulian’s weapon of resistance turns out to be a broken vase.

Marrying Wu Ruda certainly offers Shan Yulian an opportunity to free herself from the nationalist sexual allegiance in Mainland China, and Hong Kong seems full of possibilities for her to explore. However, she is bound to come across Simon, the incarnation of Ximen Qing, the man who has seduced Pan Jinlian. She is also destined to encounter Wu Long, the incarnation of Wu Song, the man who kills Pan Jinlian. Containing women’s sexuality becomes essential, particularly for Wu Ruda, the new Hong Kong patriarch. Instead of being killed by poison like Wu Da, Wu Ruda only loses his consciousness as a result of taking sex-enhancing pills given by Simon. In addition, he becomes a “man” who is strong physically and sexually. At the same time, Shan kept a sexual relationship with Simon while trying to calm her former lover Wu Long. When Wu Long out of jealousy decides to kill Simon, he is killed accidentally by Shan Yulian, who in the same car accident loses her memory of previous life. As for Simon, he becomes impotent. Both men with illegitimate sexual relations with the woman are

punished. However, as the legal husband, Wu Ruda has to be saved, whereas Shan Yulian lost memory of her previous life, along with her goal to avenge.

Some argue that what happens to Wu Long and Simon is the result of Shan Yulian's revenge, and others believe that Shan's loss of memory once for all cuts her off from a traditional text that has controlled her life.⁷⁰ Therefore, her loss of memory and live "happily ever after" with Wu Ruda in Hong Kong signals a complete new life, not disturbed by anything from Mainland China. I argue that we should free ourselves from the limitation of the traditional text of Pan Jinlian too. *The Reincarnation of the Golden Lotus* is less about Pan Jinlian, the woman of the past, than about Shan Yulian, the woman of the present. It is less about Pan's revenge than about Shan's search for love/romance, only in which can she free herself from textual punishment.

Shan Yulian and her previous life Pan Jinlian are different, after all. If the death of Wu Long and impotence of Simon happen to coincide with her plan of her revenge, returning to Wu Da/Wu Ruda is certainly not part of her plan. While Pan wishes to avenge her death, Shan only wants love/romance. But Hong Kong, represented by Wu Ruda, requires her to come home, and the only way she would come home willingly is to lose her mind. Therefore, her loss of memory is inevitable, which makes possible for her to devote her body wholly to the new legitimate patriarch, Wu Ruda. Wu Ruda finally could completely own Shan Yulian, his "compensation" and "prize" for his suffering in previous life. Shan Yulian, no more than a "prize" for Wu Ruda, completely loses her sense of self, and is transformed from a fierce angel of avenge to a pure angel of the house. Without love/romance, the "happy ending" of the story is chilling:

"Get better soon. When you're well, I'll take you to the pirate ship. Rocking back and forth, and you'll remember me. I'm your husband!..."

Shan Yulian forever kept an innocent smile.
She was very happy.
Wu Ruda was also very happy.
This kind-hearted man could at last have her completely.
Finally,
This,
Is,
Forever.⁷¹

Hong Kong, as an alternative space for Pan Jinlian/Shan Yulian, is just another same location, and the so-called “happily-ever-after” is simply another chain that keeps women’s sexuality in place.

Interestingly, the film version, accentuating the struggling romantic relationship between Shan Yulian and Wu Long, is more subversive in deconstructing Hong Kong as an alternative space for Shan Yulian. Shan does not just want to live, but wishes to love and be loved. It is her love for Wu Long that changes her mind of revenge. She would like to have “forever,” but it is only with the man she loves. Hong Kong, the new place, has not given her any freedom of choices. Like in her previous life and her life in the Mainland China, she is controlled instead of being in control. In this sense, it is significant that Shan Yulian does not survive her car accident, but she can finally go “home” with Wu Long in their death.

Conclusion:

The contradiction in Li Bihua’s popular fiction provides different critics (as well as readers) enough space to imagine cultural and national identities and to reconstruct history and future. In our a partial production of Li Bihua and her works, we critics and readers can engage in critical conversations with each other and challenge each other and ourselves. What is more important is that cultural production and reproduction continues

in the forms of dialogs between critics so that Li Bihua's contradiction today will be recognized, instead of being either writing out of literary history or hailed as a perfect hero.

Li Bihua is read into being. One pitfall that I find in the debate of Li Bihua is the unsaid consensus that we could uncover a "real" "original" Li Bihua, ignoring the ambiguity of her texts and the defining power of reading. While we charge others of reading "illegitimate" meanings into Li Bihua, we may as well be doing the same. As a result, it is extremely important to read subversive meanings into Li Bihua's works, particularly if they could be read as conservative writing. If not anything else, this kind of reading could discover subversive contradiction even in many "so-called" conservative books. What is more exciting than to deconstruct from within? While some critics lament about the demand of capitalist cultural industry on Hong Kong writers who "had to 'put their feet on two boats,' writing both commodities and novels they wished to write,"⁷² it is enlightening to note Fujii Shozo's argument that we "should be able to find good works among entertaining writings composed for bread."⁷³

Li Bihua, more than any other writers in this project, reminds me of Aphra Behn, the pioneer of English fiction whose popularity at her time did not earn her space in the literary history of English literature until the intervention of feminist critics in the second half of twentieth century. Li Bihua, although considered a rising star in contemporary literary and cultural criticism, may very well suffer for her own popularity. Li Bihua is always curious about possible stories of famous women under different circumstances and different frameworks, but where would Li Bihua be when the trend of cultural studies and post-colonial studies is over? Would we still find her in a chapter, a paragraph, a

couple of sentences, or even a footnote, in the literary histories of Hong Kong and/or China?

My intention here is not to attack different interpretations, but to offer another point of view, a feminist point of view on Li Bihua, as my intervention of cultural production. With my interpretation that Li Bihua is an author, full of contradictions in her romanticizing the national space of China and Hong Kong, I wish both to challenge readers in hope to “sell” my own ideas if I want to continue to survive as a literary and cultural critic, and to make them “popular” if I wish to be a critic with “star power.”

Conclusion

My feminist production of contemporary controversial women authors of different geopolitical Chinese locations intends to emphasize the flexible nature of the feminist-nationalist tension, always historically and locationally contingent. The Kingston controversy is historically located in the constructed mutual exclusivity of women's movements and Asian American nationalist movements of the United States, and its cultural and political significance today relies on the continuous reconstruction and production of American feminism, Asian American cultural nationalism, and Asian American feminism.

Similarly situated is the imagining of "China" and "Chinese America," and it seems that critics have settled the controversy in their writing. I am interested in how the cultural meanings of Kingston and her text might change with the changing dynamics of Chinese American community in the United States. Specifically, will Kingston have different social and political significance to new Chinese immigrants whose ties to China are stronger than those who have lived in the U.S. for generations? Will her text influence how China is being produced and reproduced? Or will the production of China, particularly as a potential enemy, impact the way she is read or produced in the United States? In this sense, the inclusion of Chinese America into the mapping of global Chineseness is to recognize the intricate relationship between contemporary cultural production of China and that of Chinese America. It is not to create a Chinese center, but to complicate both nationalisms within a global context.

It is in this nationalist context of global Chineseness that feminism is imagined, produced and negotiated. The Wei Hui controversy not only demonstrates the male-

centered contemporary Chinese literary and cultural criticism that contributes to officially defined nationalist discourses, it also points out the dead-end predicament of Chinese nationalist feminism in need to redefine its relation with Chinese nationalism. After decades of working together for a new modern Chinese nation that embraces women's liberation, Chinese feminism and nationalism have arrived at a crossroad. The ban of Wei Hui's book should be a wake-up call for Chinese feminist critics that Chinese feminism must remain its critical edge, not just toward the voyeuristic male gaze of the female body, but also toward the repression of male-centered nationalist discourses.

If the Wei Hui controversy is symptomatic of the limited feminist space within revolutionary nationalist discourses of the Mainland China, the case of Li Ang is deeply rooted in the historical developments of feminism and Taiwanese nationalism as interrelated movements in opposition to China-identified authoritarian government rule. Taking into consideration of Taiwanese nationalist rising to power, I see the parallel between the development of Taiwanese feminism and that of Chinese feminism, both of which are inextricably related with a desire for a newly defined nation. The similar experience (record numbers of sales) and the different outcome (one is banned and the other continues to sell) of Wei Hui and Li Ang's books on the one hand shows the ambiguous position of the popular culture while on the other manifests the differently produced nationalism and particularly feminism. In other words, the difference has much to do the relative freedom and critical distance of Taiwanese feminism from male-centered nationalistic interpellation.

The insider-outsider position of Hong Kong in relation to China is explored in Li Bihua's conventional yet oppositional fictional plot of love and romance. It is only within

the context of contemporary popular culture of Hong Kong that the feminist-nationalist tension is full of irony: it is both limited and radical. It is limited because of Li Bihua's reliance on conservative romantic plot depending on the hierarchy of gender, and yet it is radical precisely because the plot of love and romance displaces masculinist nationalism while at the same time deconstructing the gender hierarchy. The controversy of Li Bihua, in comparison with Wei Hui and Li Ang, is inextricably linked to the ambiguous role of the popular culture, the signature culture of Hong Kong, in which both feminism and nationalism seem to be reduced to commodities for sale instead of politically and culturally significant symbols. I hope that my production of the debate on Li Bihua as well as of her significance will not only bring attention to the critical issue of feminist-nationalist negotiation in contemporary Hong Kong whose identity is still in the making, but it will generate critical conversations on the imagining of feminist criticism in Hong Kong and the global Chinese spaces.

As mentioned previously, what connects Wei Hui, Li Ang and Li Bihua is their intimate link to the popular commercial culture, which to a degree determines their urban locations. It is in the space of the city—Shanghai, Hong Kong and Taipei—that feminism, nationalism and post-/colonialism are inextricably intertwined. While Shanghai and Hong Kong have often been referred to as twin cities (*shuangcheng*), competing for the title of “the Oriental Pearl,” it is the Shanghai-Hong Kong-Taipei “tripe cities” (*sancheng ji*), with their similar and different colonial and post-colonial past and present, that captures people's imagination.

Shanghai, the international metropolis that housed early nationalist and feminist developments, has been a cultural sign of the Chinese nation, from the flourishing colonial culture in the 1920s and 1930s, to the Japanese occupation in the late 1930s through 1940s, from the repression of its commercial culture since the 1950s to the reviving of its past glory particularly since the 1990s. In the efforts to rise to the status of a strong modern nation is a kind of nostalgia, commodified of course, for its colonial golden days, when Shanghai was the “Oriental Pearl” recognized by the whole wide world, namely the colonists. Its recent urban re-planning, including the famous “first tower of Asia,” is to continue the project of nation building, ironically in the re-created world of neocolonists.

Quite a few Shanghai women authors have dealt with this nostalgia, and Zhang Ailing (Eileen Chang) in the 1940s and Wang Anyi since the 1980s are the best examples. Zhang Ailing became a well-known author as a result of, not despite, the Japanese occupation of Shanghai, which forced most writers to leave the city and thus caused a literary void. In addition, her fiction created a space of Shanghai as an isolated island, not much impacted by the outside world, including the Japanese invasion in Shanghai and throughout China. It was the fates of women of the privileged class—their failed love and marriage—that interested her. Thus, Zhang’s writing on women is dangerous and anti-nationalist in a sense, which explained the controversy of her success in occupied Shanghai.

On the other hand, Wang Anyi, considered by many as the true disciple of Zhang Ailing, has also produced a Shanghai defined by its colonial prosperity. Her fiction in the 1980s seems to portray Shanghai during and right after the Cultural Revolution, but it is

really about Shanghai's narcissistic desire for its glorious colonial past, when it was the heaven for upper-class men and women. Her 1995 *A Tale of Everlasting Sorrow* puts that nostalgia into action and re-presents/re-produces the colonial Shanghai through none other than the life and death of Miss Shanghai.

Nostalgic, both Zhang Ailing and Wang Anyi keep a critical distance from that past with their ironic attitude. In fact, Wang Anyi's cool and aloof attitude serves as a necessary balance to the feverish desire to re-create the colonial past. Therefore, her writing is sensational, which leads to her winning the officially recognized first-class literary prize (Mao Dun Literary Prize), not to controversy. It is Wei Hui who has tipped that balance with her complete embrace of the neocolonial or post-colonial Westernized popular culture and her genuine desire, or fetishism, for the colonial past. Seeing herself and seen by some people as a follower of Zhang Ailing, Wei Hui is as dangerous as Zhang Ailing of the 1940s. Shanghai is in fact an isolated island drifting away from nationalist struggle, an isolated island occupied by Japan in the 1940s and by all kinds of neocolonists now.

Hong Kong, the international metropolis, has been dealing with its own colonial history and post-colonial return to its motherland, China. Li Bihua is not the only woman author that consciously imagines Hong Kong consciousness. Authors such as Xi Xi and Shi Shuqing have also been constructing Hong Kong's past and present. Xi Xi's *My City*, *Beautiful Mansion*, and *Migratory Birds* re-present in details the lives of Hong Kong residents stuck within the high-rise apartment buildings of a rootless floating city. Hong Kong in Xi Xi's writing is on the one hand open and pleasant while on the other closed and suffocating. The "beautiful mansion," crowded with people busy at moving,

shopping, job hunting, telephoning and even watching TV, is both full of the rhythm of life and empty of the purpose of living. Between the lines of detailed description of the everyday lives of Hong Kong residents is Xi Xi's compassionate and passionate concern of the city's past, present and particularly future. She is identified with Hong Kong, but she is also critical of its mindless popular culture, which is exactly where Li Bihua's controversy lies in.

Like Wei Hui, Li Bihua is not critical of the popular culture but plays its games with full participation. It is in her embrace of the popular that she distances from nationalist discourses, although the voyeuristic commercial culture dilutes Li's critique of patriarchal nationalism (just like in the case of Wei Hui). With the steady rule of the popular culture—including the Hong-Kong-centered popular culture—in the Mainland, and within the contexts of Shanghai and Hong Kong competing to be the post-colonial Oriental Pearl, Li Bihua's popularity is meaningful and her controversy is significant.

My choice of Li Ang is not random either. Indeed different women authors have constructed different nationalisms in Taiwan, Taiwan-centered, China-centered and Aboriginal. Identified with China-centered nationalism, Zhu Tianxin, the second-generation Mainlander, is distant and critical of both China-centered and Taiwan-centered nationalisms. Often her critique of the new mainstream Taiwanese nationalism is profound, not limited to the popularized absolute political divide between the Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Democratic Party (DDP). Instead of losing herself in the China vs. Taiwan debate, Zhu Tianxin questions the political partiality of the different constructions of the past, and for her, the new nationalist imagination is simply another brainwash, a memory supported by deliberate forgetting. On the other hand, Liglav A-wu

writes the Aboriginal culture into the present consciousness. However, both Zhu Tianxin and A-wu are the voices from the margin, distant from the mainstream Taiwan-centered nationalism as well as the mainstream popular culture.

It is in Li Ang that the fin-de-siecle urban decadence that Zhu Tianxin critiques is embodied. Although Li Ang is as critical as Zhu Tianxin and A-wu of the Taiwanese nationalist discourses, she resorts to the ambiguous popular culture to present her critiques. As a result, her critiques are just as ambiguous and controversial.

Some critics might question the literary qualities of Wei Hui, Li Ang and Li Bihua and consider them no more than popular novelists made possible by global capitalism. They might even suggest that my textual selection is motivated by a self-served desire to be part of the superficiality of the popular culture. For me, the literary values of a text are also historically constructed. My approach to these texts and authors has produced different cultural meanings, hence values, of them. On the other hand, I think that it is extremely crucial to participate in the cultural production of the popular culture. For if we do not do it from feminist critical perspectives, other people would surely not stop their production. In fact, I believe it is the responsibility of feminist critics to be a part and a big part of it.

The mapping of China and Chineseness is indeed challenging, and it actually proves the futility of any attempt to draw a decisive conclusion. Or to put it in another way, any mapping of the global Chineseness is temporary, contingent on specific historical circumstances. However, my focus on the controversy of differently located Chinese women authors is not just to manifest the flexibility in the cultural production of

Chineseness. As a feminist critic, I am more interested in feminist engagement with nationalism within different geopolitical contexts of and beyond the imagined Chinese nation-space.

I am interested in the relations between Third World feminism and Third World nationalism, and how similar and different national histories, coupled with sweeping economic/cultural Eurocentric globalization, have constructed similar and different development of feminist criticism under those specific historical circumstances. Again, I use the term “Third World” as defined by Mohanty, and in a sense I hope that my exploration of controversial Chinese women authors will illuminate feminist-nationalist engagement within the larger Third World contexts. This is also the reason that I have briefly discussed the controversy of African American women authors such as Alice Walker and Michelle Wallace in Chapter 1.

Acutely aware of the theoretically and historically produced feminist-nationalist contradiction women of color often have to deal with within their specific global national contexts, I also recognize that the controversy is not limited to Third World women authors. In this sense, my reference to Virginia Woolf’s controversy and controversial text is to provide a theoretical support and to recognize the connection between European woman and Third World women. Moreover, the connection is not just that we all experience this tension between feminism and nationalism, but how we can learn from each other, while fully acknowledging our differences.

As a feminist critic committed to establishing commonalities among different women and gender situations, I also see the necessity to build solidarity beyond feminist space in the hope to be critically involved in the shaping of societies and cultures, which

in turn would strengthen the cultural and political significance of feminist criticism. Therefore, I do not wish to reinforce an essentialized notion of gender but to point out possible connections and overlaps between the controversies of women authors and those of male authors, which accounts for the limited space allocated to the discussion of controversial Chinese American or Chinese male writers such as David Huang and Ha Jin. The space of discussion is limited not as a result of the insignificance of these controversies but because of my intention to make the readers aware of the complexities of the gender-race controversies and of the intricate interplays of different social, political or cultural factors. My focus is on women authors, and interested readers can do research on their own on how male writers deal with male-centered nationalist discourses.

My commitment to the flexible construction of feminism and nationalism can only work if feminism is envisioned also as oppositional or critical. Throughout the project, I have emphasized the necessity of oppositional spirit while reducing the complexities of the controversies. As I have argued, the controversy of women authors of different global Chinese locations has much to do with the often distorted cultural and discursive production and appropriation of feminist criticism, for all kinds of reasons like commercial and/or political. The feminist mission, in my opinion, has to be active participation in the production of the controversies so as to redefine the issues and re-energize feminist production of knowledge and feminism itself.

This project is my contribution to the cultural production of feminism, nationalism, as well as the popular culture within the different geopolitical locations of China. It does not intend to settle the controversy once for all but hopes to bring attention

to the extreme necessity and significance of feminist knowledge and theory production, particularly in the so-called post-feminist era. I hope that this project will kindle in my readers a passion for envisioning and producing fluid and oppositional feminist criticisms, which will shape the ways we read, the ways we write, and the ways we are.

Notes

Introduction

¹ “Third World women” or women of color here refer to women in Third World countries and women of color in Third World conditions, as defined or mapped by Chandra Mohanty in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. “This is a term which designates a political constituency, not a biological or even sociological one. It is a sociopolitical designation for people of African, Caribbean, Asian, and Latin American descent, and native peoples of the U.S. It also refers to ‘new immigrants’ to the U.S. in the last decade—Arab, Korean, Thai, Laotian, etc.” 7.

² Ernest Gellner, “Nationalism as a Product of Industrial Society,” in *The Ethnicity Reader: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Migration*, eds. Montserrat Guibernau and John Rex (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 52.

³ Benedict Anderson, “The Nation and the Origin of National Consciousness,” in *The Ethnicity Reader: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Migration*, 44.

⁴ Stanley Fish. “Interpreting the *Variorum*,” in *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies*, eds. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer (New York: Longman, 1993),

⁵ Patrocínio Schweickart, “Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading,” in *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies*, .

⁶ Stuart Hall, “Encoding, Decoding,” in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1994), 90-103.

⁷ David Leiwei Li, *Imagining the Nation: Asian American Literature and Cultural Consent* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 176. Also see Li’s “Re-presenting *The Woman Warrior*: An Essay of Interpretive History,” in *Critical Essays on Maxine Hong Kingston*, ed. Laura E. Skandera-Trombely (New York: G.K. Hall, 1998), 182-203.

⁸ Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (San Diego: A Harvest Book, 1966), 78-80.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁰ Hall, 93-95.

¹¹ Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 184.

¹² Fish, 181.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 188-189.

¹⁴ Schweickart, 191.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 205.

¹⁷ Hall, 95.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁹ Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 184.

²⁰ Lotman, Yuriy & B.A. Uspensky. “On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture,” in *Critical Theory since 1965*, eds. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1986), 413.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 410, 416.

²² David Leiwei Li, *Imagining the Nation*, 52. Also see Li’s “Re-presenting *The Woman Warrior*,” 190.

²³ Mary E. Young, *Mules and Dragons: Popular Culture Images in Selected Writings of African-American and Chinese American Women Writers*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993.

²⁴ Lydia Liu, 186. “Jameson’s hypothesis becomes meaningful and revealing, rather than simply false, because it plays into the nation-oriented and male-centered practice of literary criticism within the First World as well as the Third.” I don’t think it problematic to be obsessed with the nation, but I am very critical of the practice of nationalist discourse that oppresses, represses, and silences anyone of different opinions.

²⁵ Rey Chow, “Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem,” in *Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory: Reimagining a Field*, ed. Rey Chow (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 16.

- ²⁶ Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text* 15 (Fall 1986): 65-88.
- ²⁷ Chow, 3.
- ²⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 94.
- ²⁹ Lydia Liu, 186.
- ³⁰ See Jameson's "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism."
- ³¹ David Leiwei Li, *Imagining the Nation*, 65.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 51.
- ³³ David Leiwei Li, "Re-presenting The Woman Warrior: An Essay of Interpretive History," in *Critical Essays on Maxine Hong Kingston*, ed. Laura E. Skandera-Trombley (G.K. Hall & Co.: New York, 1998), 190.
- ³⁴ The male-centeredness of the discourse of representational inevitability has much to do with the gendered condition of literary criticism. For the discussion of gender and criticism, see Lydia Liu 195-199.
- ³⁵ Liu Yiqing, "Bartering Away Honesty: Ha Jin and His Waiting," *Chinese Reading Weekly* (June 14, 2000), <http://www.gmw.cn/01ds/2000-06/14/GB/2000^304^0^DS1914.htm>. See also Li Zhenbing, "Ha Jin: Demonizing China?" *Multidimensional Weekly* 4 (23 June 2000), <http://www.duoweeweek.com/4/BlackEye/311.html>. Also "VOA Reports: Ha Jin's Waiting Waits to Be Published." <http://www.voa.gov/chinese/archive/worldfocus/jun2000/fri/0623002hajinwaitingwaitstobepu.htm>, and Changqing, "Why Are Award-winning Novels in the U.S. Not Allowed to Publish in Mainland China?" *Xiaocankao Daily News - A Subsidiary of Chinese VIP Reference* 837 (8 July 2000), <http://www.bignews.org/20000708.txt>
- ³⁶ Anderson, "The Nation and the Origin of National Consciousness," 44.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 47-50.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.
- ³⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 299.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3-4.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ⁴² Gellner, "Nationalism as a Product of Industrial Society," 52.
- ⁴³ Max Weber, "What is an Ethnic Group?" *The Ethnicity Reader: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Migration*, 20.
- ⁴⁴ Lee, Rachel C. *The Americas of Asian American Literature: Gendered Fictions of Nation and Transnation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 4.
- ⁴⁵ Joane Najel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 159.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.
- ⁴⁷ Leslie Bow, *Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion: Feminism, Sexual Politics, Asian American Women's Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 9-11.
- ⁴⁸ Michelle Wallace, "Negative Images: Towards a Black Feminist Cultural Criticism," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, 124.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 125.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.
- ⁵¹ Mohanty, Chandra. "Under the Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 52.
- ⁵² Kadiatu Kanneh, "Feminism and the Colonial Body," in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995), 347.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 348.
- ⁵⁴ Michelle Yeh, "International Theory and the Transnational Critic: China in the Age of Multiculturalism," in *Modern Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory*, 273.
- ⁵⁵ Anderson, 45.
- ⁵⁶ Shao Yuming, "Preface: Writing Before 'The Conference on Forty Years of Chinese Literature,'" *Forty Years of Chinese Literature: 1949-1993*, eds. Shao Yuming, Zhang Baoqin and Ya Xuan (Taipei: United Literature, 1995), 9-10.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

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- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 10. Yan means Yan-di or Emperor Yan, a famous tribe leader in ancient Chinese mythology. Huang is Huang-di or Emperor Huang, another tribe leader in ancient Chinese mythology. Because they unified the different tribes, Chinese people call themselves “Descendents of Yan-Huang.”
- ⁵⁹ Wang, Meng, “Fresh Wind, Clean Land, Pure Joy: Speech on the Banquet of “The Conference of Forty Years of Chinese Literature,” in *Forty Years of Chinese Literature: 1949-1993*, 524-528.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 525.
- ⁶¹ Zhang Xiguo, “Betrayal and Redemption in Prodigal Literature,” in *Forty Years of Chinese Literature: 1949-1993*, 464.
- ⁶² Ping Lu. “The New Path of Writing by Chinese Writers in the U.S,” in *Forty Years of Chinese Literature: 1949-1993*, 472.
- ⁶³ Ping Lu explains creativity in relation to the disintegration of a center, citing research done by D.K. Simonton of UC at Davis, who argues, “Among all the variables, the surge of creativity has much to do the collapse of the nation.” For example, music composed during political turmoil has “the most potential” to be circulated widely. “The New Path of Writing by Chinese Writers in the U.S.” 472-473.
- ⁶⁴ Leo Ou-fan Lee, “Forty-Years of Overseas Literature,” in *Forty Years of Chinese Literature: 1949-1993*, 65.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., 65.
- ⁶⁶ Rey Chow, “Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem,” in *Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory*.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., 8.
- ⁶⁸ Ien Ang, “Can One Say No to Chineseness: Pushing the Limits of the Diasporic Paradigm,” in *Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory*, 283.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid., 287.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid., 283.
- ⁷¹ Ibid., 297.
- ⁷² Ibid., 281.
- ⁷³ Ibid., 281. Quoted from William Yang’s *Sadness*.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., 293.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid., 297.
- ⁷⁶ Michelle Yeh, “International Theory and the Transnational Critic,” in *Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory*, 275.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., 270.
- ⁷⁸ Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian America Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 5.
- ⁷⁹ Chandra Mohanty, “Introduction,” 5.
- ⁸⁰ Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (San Diego: A Harvest Book, 1966), 80.
- ⁸¹ Ibid., 107-109.
- ⁸² Friedman, Susan Stanford. *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 4.
- ⁸³ Ibid., 19.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid., 4.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid., 19.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid., 4.
- ⁸⁷ Ibid., 46.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid., 45.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid., 45.
- ⁹⁰ Nigel Nicolson, *Virginia Woolf* (New York: Viking, 2000), 160.
- ⁹¹ Friedman, 4.

Chapter 1

¹ See Laura E. Skandera-Trombley, “Introduction,” in *Critical Essays on Maxine Hong Kingston* ((New York: G.K. Hall & Co, 19998), 4-5. See also David Leiwei Li, “Re-presenting The Woman Warrior: An Essay of Interpretive History,” 195.

² Stephen Talbot quoted by David Leiway Li, *Imagining the Nation*, 57.

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- ³ Esther Mikyung Ghymn, *Images of Asian American Women by Asian American Women Writers* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 91.
- ⁴ Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, "Chinese American Literature," in *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. King-kok Cheung (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- ⁵ Kingston, Maxine Hong. "Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers," in *Critical Essays*, 95.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 101.
- ⁸ Leonard, John. "In Defiance of 2 Worlds," in *Critical Essays on Maxine Hong Kingston*, 77.
- ⁹ Diane Johnson, "Ghosts," *Critical Essays on Maxine Hong Kingston*, 80.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 81.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 82-83.
- ¹² See Diane Johnson's reply to Jeffery Chan, *Critical Essays on Maxine Hong Kingston*, 87. Also Kingston, "Cultural Misreadings," 102. And Chan, 85.
- ¹³ Johnson's reply, 87.
- ¹⁴ Jeffery Paul Chan, "The Mysterious West," *Critical Essays on Maxine Hong Kingston*, 86.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.
- ¹⁶ In fact, David Leiwei Li argues that part of *The Woman Warrior* ("No Name Woman") "is probably the only Asian American literature many college students will ever be exposed to." In "Re-presenting *The Woman Warrior*," 199.
- ¹⁷ David Leiwei Li, *Imagining the Nation*, 320.
- ¹⁸ Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 4.
- ¹⁹ David Leiwei Li, "The Production of Chinese American Tradition: Displacing American Orientalist Discourse," in *Reading the Literatures of Asian America*. eds. Shirley Geok-lin Lim & Amy Ling (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 322.
- ²⁰ Lowe, 4-5.
- ²¹ Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "The Ambivalent American: Asian American Literature on the Cusp," in *Reading the Literatures of Asian America*, 13.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 13-14.
- ²³ David Leiwei Li, "Re-presenting *The Woman Warrior*: An Essay of Interpretive History," 198-199.
- ²⁴ Sidonie Smith, "Filiality and Woman's Autobiographical Storytelling," in *Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior: A Casebook*, ed. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 58.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p57.
- ²⁶ Leslie W Rabine, "No Lost Paradise: Social Gender and Symbolic Gender in the Writings of Maxine Hong Kingston," in *Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior: A Casebook*, 100.
- ²⁷ Frank Chin, "This Is Not An Autobiography," in *Genre* 18, No. 2 (1985), 122.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, "This Is Not An Autobiography," 122-124.
- ²⁹ See also Chin, "'Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake,'" in *The Bif Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature* (New York: A Meridian Book, 1991), 1-92.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3-8.
- ³¹ Esther Mikyung Ghymn, *Images of Asian American Women by Asian American Women Writers* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 154-160.
- ³² Chin, "The Most Popular Book," in *Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior: A Casebook*, 25.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 23-24.
- ³⁴ Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, "Autobiography as Guided Chinatown Tour? Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and the Chinese American Autobiographical Controversy," in *Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior: A Casebook*, 35.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 44-45.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.
- ³⁸ King-kok Cheung, "The Woman Warrior versus the Chinaman Pacific: Must a Chinese American Critic Choose between Feminism and Heroism?" in *Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior: A Casebook*, 113-114.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 127.

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- ⁴¹ Sheng-mei Ma, *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian American and Asian Diaspora Literatures*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 19.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 19.
- ⁴³ Susan Brownmiller, "Susan Brownmiller Talks with Maxine Hong Kingston, Author of *The Woman Warrior*," in *Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior: A Casebook*, 175.
- ⁴⁴ See Susan Brownmiller, and Kingston's interview with Laura E. Skandera-Trombley, "A Conversation with Maxine Hong Kingston," in *Critical Essays*, 33-48.
- ⁴⁵ Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, "Introduction," in *Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior: A Casebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3.
- ⁴⁶ Leslie Bow, *Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion: Feminism, Sexual Politics, Asian American Women's Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 11.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.
- ⁴⁸ Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, 8.
- ⁴⁹ Skandera-Trombley, "A Conversation with Maxine Hong Kingston," 33.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 34.
- ⁵² Xiaohuang Yin, *Chinese American Literature since the 1850s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 246.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 238-239.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 238.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 237.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 234-235.
- ⁵⁷ Bow, 10.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.
- ⁶⁰ David Leiwei Li, *Imagining the Nation*, 194.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 26.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 45.
- ⁶³ Li, "Re-presenting *The Woman Warrior*," 186.
- ⁶⁴ Jinqi Ling, *Narrating Nationalism: Ideology and Form in Asian American Literature*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 6.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 152-153.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 155.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 157.
- ⁷¹ Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, 8.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, 8.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 8.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 12-13.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 14-15.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 53.
- ⁸² *Ibid.*, 21.
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*, 47.
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 30-31.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

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- ⁸⁸ Ibid., 40.
⁸⁹ Ibid., 33.
⁹⁰ Ibid., 33.
⁹¹ Ibid., 33.
⁹² Ibid., 35.
⁹³ Ibid., 44-45.
⁹⁴ Ibid., 71-72.
⁹⁵ Ibid., 76-77.
⁹⁶ Ibid., 8.
⁹⁷ Ibid., 108.
⁹⁸ Ibid., 48-49.
⁹⁹ Ibid., 53.
¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 5.
¹⁰¹ Ibid., 184-185.
¹⁰² Ibid., 39.
¹⁰³ Ibid., 48.
¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 52.
¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 53.
¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 208-209.
¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 209.
¹⁰⁸ Kingston, "Cultural Misreadings," 103..
¹⁰⁹ Dasenbrock, Reed Way. "Intelligibility and Meaningfulness in Multicultural Literature in English (Excerpts)," in *Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior: A Casebook*, 161, 163.

Chapter 2

¹ Wei Hui. *Shanghai Baby* (Shanghai Baobei). Hong Kong: Heaven and Earth Publishing, 2000. Also Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baby*. Trans. Bruce Humes. New York: Washington Square Press, 2001. Wei Hui's full name is Zhou Wei-hui. Since Wei Hui, her given name, is the name she uses for her writing, Wei Hui is the name I use in this chapter. When I use the Chinese version, the translation is mine. I also want to make two points on the English version of the novel. First, it changes the Chinese name of the heroine Ni Ke to an English name Nikki. Although the two names have similar pronunciation, Ni Ke is a full name and Nikki is only a first name. Besides, she has already had an English name—Coco. Therefore, I will use either Ni Ke or Coco in my discussion even if I quote from Humes' translation. Second, the translated version has made a crucial mistake in mistranslating *nanhai* (boy) into man, *nuhai* (girl) into woman. I will stick with the original Chinese version whenever this is concerned. The changes I made will be explained and put in brackets.

² Wei Hui (2001), 18.

³ Ibid., 23.

⁴ Ibid., 18.

⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁷ Ibid., 35-36.

⁸ Ibid., 19.

⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰ Ibid., 1.

¹¹ Ibid., 19.

¹² Ibid., 19.

¹³ Ibid., 253.

¹⁴ Ibid., 253.

¹⁵ Ibid., 260-261.

¹⁶ Ibid., 19. The original means that nobody wants to be a writer now, but Coco will "make it very cool and fashionable." See Wei Hui (1999), 23.

¹⁷ Ibid., 24-25.

¹⁸ Ibid., 25.

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- ¹⁹ Wei Hui (1999), 76.
- ²⁰ Wei Hui (2001), 3.
- ²¹ Ibid., 3.
- ²² Ibid., 92-93.
- ²³ Ibid., 9. The original compares her to “a poisonous flower,” see Wei Hui (1999), 12.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 2.
- ²⁵ Wei Hui (1999), 20.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 288.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 294.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 274.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 277.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 114.
- ³¹ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film: Configurations of Space, Time and Gender*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.
- ³² Zhan., 4.
- ³³ Ibid., 4.
- ³⁴ Ibid., 233.
- ³⁵ Yang, Yang. “The New Transformations of Chinese Literature in the 1990s.” *Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art* (No. 1, 2000): 21-22.
- ³⁶ Wei Hui (2001), 14-15.
- ³⁷ But Humes’ translation completely erases this difference.
- ³⁸ Wei Hui (1999), 6.
- ³⁹ Ibid., 30.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 8.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 220.
- ⁴² Ibid., 36.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 54.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 116.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 4.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 33.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 197-198.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 69.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 68.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 111.
- ⁵¹ Wei, Hui. 150. People in the world are roughly categorized by their color in China: white (European/Caucasian), black (African), yellow (Asian) and brown (aboriginal Australian). Because of Wei Hui’s emphasis in skin color, I translate literally here. Sandy Lam is a famous pop singer, and Gong Li has starred many internationally award-winning Chinese films such as *Raise the Red Lantern*, *Red Sorghum*, *Judou*, *The Story of Qiuju*, etc.
- ⁵² Wei, Hui. 296.
- ⁵³ Dong Limin, “Degenerated Flying: A Comment on the Novelists Born in 1970s,” in *Quarterly Journal of the Shanghai Academy of Social Science* 4 (2000), 147.
- ⁵⁴ Wu, Zilin. “Literary Criticism in the Context of Mass Culture,” in *Theoretical Studies* (Mar. 2001), 56.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 56.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 56.
- ⁵⁷ Li Fang. “Are You A Beauty? Then Go and Be a Writer.” *China Youth Daily* (21 Mar. 2000), <http://www.cyol.net/cyd/zqb/2000313/GB/9800%5EQ813.htm>
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ⁵⁹ Wei Jie. “Hot Reviewing Wei Hui.” <http://www.3721web.com/cool/cool6.html>
- ⁶⁰ See *Writer: A Literary Monthly*. July 1999.
- ⁶¹ Hong Xu. “‘Beauty Writers’ Don’t Agree—Listen to What Wei Hui and Mian Mian Have to Say.” *China Youth Daily* (20 Mar. 2000), <http://www.cyol.net/cyd/zqb/20000320/GB/9807%5EQ702.htm>
- ⁶² Che Li. “Wei Hui Made Readers Scream,” in *Western China City Daily* (hua xi du shi bao) (Apr. 2, 2000), <http://wccdaily.scol.com.cn/2000/0004/02/xyl03a.html>

- ⁶³ Wu Deyu, Yang Fan & Che Li. "Wei Hui Is Really Wild," in *Western China City Daily* (April 1, 2000) <http://wccdaily.scol.com.cn/0004/01/xyl04a.html>
- ⁶⁴ Dai Yanni, "To Watch Bai Yansong on Fire or to See Wei Hui 'Baby,'" in *Tian Fu Morning* (tian fu zao bao) (2 Apr. 2000), <http://morning.scol.com.cn/2000/200004/02/html/3703.html>
- ⁶⁵ Dai Yanni, "Chengdu People Questioning Shanghai Baby," in *Tian Fu Morning* (5 Apr. 2000), <http://morning.scol.com.cn/2000/200004/05/html/3001.htm>
- ⁶⁶ Dai Yanni, "Chendu Woman Writer Warns Wei Hui to Keep Integrity of Woman and Literature," in *Tian Fu Morning* (9 Apr. 2000), <http://morning.scol.com.cn/2000/200004/09/html/3004.htm>
- ⁶⁷ Wu Fei, "Wei Hui's Chendu Portrait Incident: Who is on Earth Responsible." *Beijing Youth Daily*, April 12, 2000. <http://www.bjyouth.com.cn/Bqb/20000412/GB/4216%5ED0412B22.html> The newspaper that published the clarification was *Business Morning*, a Sichuan-based newspaper.
- ⁶⁸ Wang Yan, "Wei Hui Wants to Publish a Portrait Album," *Tian Fu Morning* (4 Apr. 2000), <http://morning.scol.com.cn/2000/200004/04/html/3013.html>
- ⁶⁹ Ibid.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid.
- ⁷¹ One good example is published on *Beijing Youth Weekly*.
- ⁷² Yu Ren, "What 'Mistake' Have Beauty Writers Made?" *Netease*. 25 Mar. 2002. 29 Mar. 2000 <<http://www6.163.com/literature/item/0,2276,4272,00.html>>.
- ⁷³ "Wei Hui and Mian Mian: Who Started It?" *Netease*. 25 Mar. 2002. 2000 <<http://www6.163.cin/news/p-content/0,1585,688,00.html>>.
- ⁷⁴ "Yong gan jia bu yao lian." See news report "Liu Jianwei Pinpoints 'Beauty Writers:' Bold and Shameless," in *Living Daily* 4 May 2000. 25 Mar. 2002, <http://edu.sina.com.cn/wander/2000-05-04/2581.shtml>.
- ⁷⁵ Li Dawei, "The Vicious and Vulgar Criticism in the Wei Hui/Mian Mian Debate," in *China Youth Daily* 19 Apr. 2000. 10 Jan. 2002. <<http://www.cyd.com.cn/cyd/zqb/20000419/GB/9837^Q821.htm>>.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid. Also see "Wei Hui Copying Mian Mian? Listen to What Experts Have to Say." *Netease* 12 Apr. 2000. 25 Mar. 2002 <<http://www6.163.com/literature/item/0,2276,4643,00.html>>.
- ⁷⁷ Mian Mian, "Wei Hui Did not Copy Me," *Netease* 12 Apr. 2000. 25 Mar. 2002 <<http://www6.163.com/literature/item/1,2276,4644,00.html>>.
- ⁷⁸ See Zhong Kun, "The Shameless Is the Fearless." 19 April 2000. 25 Mar. 2003 <http://www6.163.com/literature/item/0,2276,4912,00.html>, "When Zhong Kun Met Wei Hui." 2002. 11 Jan. 2005 <http://www.bodychannel.net/kun/detailed.asp?ID=114>>, "Angry! Why Am I Angry?!!" 21 May 2000. 25 Mar. 2003 <[http://www6.163.com/comments.php3?his=1&COMMENTS\[commentID\]=958883885&category=literature&art](http://www6.163.com/comments.php3?his=1&COMMENTS[commentID]=958883885&category=literature&art)>.
- ⁷⁹ Tan Fei. "Shanghai Baby Was Banned and Wei Hui Responded (shang hai bao bei bei jin shou, wei hui zen mo shuo)." 10 May 2000, <http://edu.sina.com.cn/2000/05/10>
- ⁸⁰ Wei Hui (1999). The English version is "Ms. Nikki, would you ever strip?" 259.
- ⁸¹ Wei Hui, "A Letter to Mian Mian.," *Netease* 28 May 2000. 25 Mar. 2002 <[www6.163.com/comments.php3?his=1&COMMENTS\[commented\]=959526334&category=literature&art.html](http://www6.163.com/comments.php3?his=1&COMMENTS[commented]=959526334&category=literature&art.html)>.
- ⁸² Shen Haobo. "About Wei Hui." May 2000. 20 Mar. 2004 <http://www.cnread.net/cnread1/sgsw/s/shenhaobo/poem/011.htm>. Translation mine.
- ⁸³ Lydia H. Liu, "Literary Criticism as A Discourse of Legitimation," *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900-1937*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- ⁸⁴ Lydia Liu, 194.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid., 188.
- ⁸⁶ Liang Hongying explains this clearly in his "Literature: Tribute to the Great Times."
- ⁸⁷ Liu, Zaifu. "Forty Years of Mainland Literature: An Outline." *Forty Years of Chinese Literature, 1949-1993* (Taipei: United Literature, 1994), 42-45.
- ⁸⁸ Zhang, Ning. "Wei Hui: A Lie to WTO."
- ⁸⁹ Ge, Hongbing. "Transnational Capital, Middle-class Taste and Current Chinese Literature." (kuaguo ziben, zhongchan jieji quwei yu dangxia zhongguo wenxue) *New China Digest* (xinhua wenzhai), July 2000, 107-109.

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- ⁹⁰ Ibid.
- ⁹¹ Zhang, Ning. "Wei Hui: A Lie to WTO."
- ⁹² Ge, Hongbing.
- ⁹³ Both the Communist Party and the Nationalist Party consider literature and art an effective tool of propaganda. Each advocated its own literary guidelines and principles, and both punished their dissents, including imprisonment and death.
- ⁹⁴ Bai Ye. "'Different' Shanghai Baby." Originally published on *China Book Business*, December 7, 1999. <http://www.yuedu.com/fanyt/nxwx/weih/wh01.htm>
- ⁹⁵ Yang Yang. "The Morning of the New Novel: In Response to Some Criticism on Novels of the Late 1990s." in *Literature Press* (wen xue bao), No. 1120, Feb. 3, 2000.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid.
- ⁹⁷ Liu Jianmei. *Revolution Plus Love: Literary History, Women's Bodies, and Thematic Repetition in Twentieth-Century Chinese Fiction*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid., 109. She is discussing Bai Wei's *Tragic Life* (Beiju shengya), an autobiographical fiction dealing with her "failed affair with both revolution and love," which leaves her abandoned in poverty with gonorrhea, contracted from her revolutionary male partner (109-110).
- ⁹⁹ Yuan Liangjun. "The Vulgarizing Trend in Literature and the Call for Lu Xun's Literary Spirit." 65.
- ¹⁰⁰ Liu Jianmei, *Revolution Plus Love*.
- ¹⁰¹ Liu, 162-192. Also see Meng Yue's *Emerging from the Horizon of History* and Wang Ban's *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China*.
- ¹⁰² Liu Jianmei, 183.
- ¹⁰³ Marriage law of the 1950s.
- ¹⁰⁴ Tani Barlow, "Politics and protocols of Funu: (un)making national woman" in *Engendering China: Women, Culture and the State*. Eds. Christina K. Gilmartin, et al. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994. 345. Barlow investigates the different representations of women by the terms of *funu*, *nuren*, and *nuxing*, all of which mean 'female subject' (340). *Funu*, promoted by the All China Women's Federation with the support of the Communist Party, is considered "the national woman" while *nuren* and *nuxing* are the terms used by post-mao writers to challenge the official establishment of *funu*.
- ¹⁰⁵ Li Ziyun, "The Disappearance and Return of Female Discourse." *Forty Years of Chinese Literature*.
- ¹⁰⁶ Qiao Yigang, *The Literary World of Chinese Women* (zhongguo nuxing de wenxue shijie). Wuhan: Hubei Education Publishing House, 1993. 79.
- ¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Qiao, 80.
- ¹⁰⁸ Xu Kun, 21.
- ¹⁰⁹ Tie Ning, "Preface," *The Rose Gate* (*Meigui men*), Collected Works by Tie Ning. Vol. 4. (Nanjing: Jiangsu Wenyi Publishing, 1996), 1-2.
- ¹¹⁰ Chen Ran, "Throwing Away," in *Alone at Home* (Xian: Shanxi Normal University Press, 1996), 233.
- ¹¹¹ Ibid., 246.
- ¹¹² Dai Jinghua. *Still in the Mirror* (you zai jing zhong) (Knowledge Publishing, 1999), 198.
- ¹¹³ Ibid., 198.
- ¹¹⁴ Wang Jiren. "Personalized, Privatized, and Fashionized: On literature of the 1990s" in *Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art* (No. 2, 2001): 2.
- ¹¹⁵ Tie Ning's response to comments that "women writers cannot go deep into life." Yu, Xiaoshi. "Women is always the theme of my Concern." *Literature Press*: vol. 1133, April 6, 2000.
- ¹¹⁶ See Yu Xiaoshi and Zhou Xiaoyan.
- ¹¹⁷ Dong Xiaoyu. "The Spiritual Predicaments of Personalized Writing by Women Writers," in *Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art*, No. 4, 2000, 72.
- ¹¹⁸ Ibid., 73-75.
- ¹¹⁹ Ibid., 73.
- ¹²⁰ Dong Limin, "Degenerated Flying: A Comment on the Novelists Born in 1970s." *Quarterly Journal of the Shanghai Academy of Social Science* 4 (2000), 145.
- ¹²¹ Dong Xiaoyu, 73.
- ¹²² Wang Dalu, "Analysis of the Phenomenon of 'Y-Generation Literature.'" *China Book Review* (*Zhong guo tu shu ping lun*) 5 (2000), 101.

- ¹²³ Yuan Liangjun, "The Vulgarizing Trend in Literature and the Call for Lu Xun's Literary Spirit," *The Graduate School Journal of China Academy of Social Science* (zhong guo she hui ke xue yuan yan jiu sheng yuan xue bao): No. 1, 2001, 64.
- ¹²⁴ Ibid., "The Vulgarizing Trend in Literature and the Call for Lu Xun's Literary Spirit," 64.
- ¹²⁵ Hong Zhigang, "Nothing but Wandering Sensuality," *Literature Press* (Feb. 3, 2000): 3.
- ¹²⁶ Zheng Xiangnan, "The Confusion of Personalized Writing and 'Alternative' Novels," *Social Science* (she hui ke xue), No. 7, 2000.
- ¹²⁷ Dai Jinghua, *Still in the Mirror*, 204.
- ¹²⁸ Chen Xiaoming, 44.

Chapter 3

- ¹ Li, Ang. "Self-Preface: Walking Through the Time of Sexuality." *The Forbidden Dark Night: Selected Sex Novels by Li Ang* (Jinse de anye: Li Ang qingse xiaoshuo ji). Taipei: Crown Cultural Publishing, 1999. 5.
- ² Chiu, Kuei-fen. "Women Writers and Taiwan Literary History." *Chung-wai Literary Monthly* (Vol. 27, No.9, February 1999): 11-13.
- ³ Ni, Yanyuan. "The Media Representation of Female Politician."
- ⁴ Xiang, Yang. "Observation on the Distribution of Taiwanese Literature." 10-112.
- ⁵ Guo Lianghui's incestuous relationships happen between the heroine and her ex-boyfriend who becomes her brother-in-law, and between the heroine and her husband's brother.
- ⁶ Xin xin wen.
- ⁷ Ni, Yanyuan. "The Media Representation of Female Politician."
- ⁸ Lin, Jiping. "Ten Literary Events." *Taiwanese Literary Annual: 1997*. Eds. By Ruiteng Li, Deping Feng, et al. Taipei: The Congressional Committee on Cultural Construction, 1997. 202.
- ⁹ Wang, David Der-wei. "Sex, Scandal, and Aesthetic Politics: On Li Ang's Sex Fiction." *Everyone Sticks into the Incense Urn of Beigang: The Devil with a Chastity Belt Series*. (beigang xianglu ren ren cha: dai zhencaodai de mogui xilie) In the series of *Contemporary Novelists*, edited by David Der-wei Wang. 9.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., 10.
- ¹¹ Ibid., 31.
- ¹² Ibid., 31.
- ¹³ Zhang, Dachun. "Don't Mess with the Novel." *New News Weekly* (xin xinwen), No. 544.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Zhang, Dachun.
- ¹⁶ Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." 246.
- ¹⁷ Althusser, 246.
- ¹⁸ Qiu, Guifen. *Noises of Women of (Not) Same Nation: Interviews of Contemporary Female Writers in Taiwan*. Taipei: Yuanzun Culture, 1998. 112-113.
- ¹⁹ Li, Ang. "Jia mian." (Fake Mask). 228.
- ²⁰ "No Reading on Tuesdays."
- ²¹ Li, Ang. *The Butcher's Wife—Stories from Lucheng*. 206.
- ²² Chen, Yuling. *The Nation in Taiwanese Literature: Women, Nativism and Anti-colonial Narratives*. Taipei: Boyyoung, 2000.43-44.
- ²³ Li, Ang. *Shafu*. 139.
- ²⁴ Wang, David Der-wei. "Sex, Scandal, and Aesthetic Politics: On Li Ang's Sex Fiction." Also see Lu Zhenghu's "Sex and Modern Society: The Theme of Sex in Li Ang's Novels" in *Novel and Society* (Taipei, Lianjing, 1988), 164.
- ²⁵ Thirty literary works were selected in the canon "Taiwanese Literary Classic." The list included 10 in fiction, 7 in poetry, 7 in prose, 3 in drama, 3 in criticism. *Conference on Taiwanese Literary Classics*.
- ²⁶ Zhang Xiaofeng's *Selected Plays by Xiaofeng* and Jian Zhen's prose *Girl Red* (nu er hong) were the other works by women included in the canon. Seven committee members voted for the whole selection. Li Ang's *The Butcher's Wife* got 6 votes, Zhang Xiaofeng got 4 and Jian Zhen was not selected until the second round.
- ²⁷ The government established by the Nationalist Party, or Kuomintang, in Taiwan since 1945. Taiwan was conceded to Japan in 1895 as a result of Sino-Japanese War and was ruled by Japan until 1945 with the

end of World War II. In 1949 after its defeat by the Communist Party, the KMT moved their central government to Taiwan in the hope to recover their lost territory

²⁸ Li, Ang. "Empty Mourning Hall." 85-86.

²⁹ Li, Ang. "Fake Mask." *Selected Works of Li Ang*. 199.

³⁰ Li, Ang, 233-234.

³¹ Li, Ang. "The Devil with Chastity Belt." 58.

³² Li, Ang. "The Devil with Chastity Belt." 59.

³³ Li, Ang. "The Empty Mourning Hall." 103.

³⁴ Li, Ang. "Beigang Incense Urn." 144.

³⁵ Li, Ang. "Bloody Sacrifice." 185.

³⁶ Zhang, Lingmin. "Interpreting the Historical Break and Continuance in "Bloody Sacrifice with Color Make-ups." 1998/07. http://www.srcs.nctu.edu.tw/taiwanlit/online_papers/bloody.html 5/19/03

³⁷ Zhang, Lingmin. "Interpreting the Historical Break and Continuance in "Bloody Sacrifice with Color Make-ups." 1998/07. http://www.srcs.nctu.edu.tw/taiwanlit/online_papers/bloody.html 5/19/03

³⁸ Wang, 36.

³⁹ Shi, Shu. "Miyuan neiwai—Li Ang Ji Xu." ("In/outside the labyrinth—Preface to *Selected Works by Li Ang*." *Li Ang Ji*. (*Selected Work by Li Ang*.)

⁴⁰ Wang, David Der-wei. "Sex, Scandal, and Aesthetic Politics: On Li Ang's Sex Fiction." 13.

⁴¹ Wu, Jinfa. "Sexual Rebellion in Li Ang's Novels: On *Love Experiments*." *Selected Works by Li Ang*. Taipei: Pioneer Publishing House, 1992. 284.

⁴² Some people accused this formation of literary canon of accentuating non-native Taiwanese writers. See Yu Guangzhong. *Dynamic and Diverse: Hong Kong Literature*.

⁴³ Lu, 159.

⁴⁴ Ye, Shitao. *An Outline of the History of Taiwanese Literature*. Taipei: Literary World, 1987. 99.

⁴⁵ Cheng, Fangming. "____." This project was published chapter by chapter on *United Literature*.

⁴⁶ Peng, Xiaoyan. "Waiting for the Days that Darkness Ends and Light Dawns: On Ye Shitao's *An Outline of the History of Taiwan Literature*." Conference on the Canon of Taiwanese Literature. Ed. Chen Yizhi. Taipei: Lianjing Press, 1999. 492-493.

⁴⁷ Qiu, Guifen. "Exploring the Methodologies on the History of Taiwanese (Women) Novels." *Chung-Wai Literary Monthly (Zhongwai Wenxue)* (No. 9, Vol. 27, 1999).

⁴⁸ Xia Zhiqing's *A History of Modern Chinese Novels*, for example.

⁴⁹ Li, Ang. "Preface: Walking through the Time of Sexuality." 4.

⁵⁰ Li, Ang. *Miyuan (The Labyrinth)*. 276.

⁵¹ Minnan dialect, spoken by local residents of Fujian Province of China. Most of the people in Taiwan were descendants of Fujianese migrated to Taiwan through the Taiwan Strait. Nowadays Minnanhua was considered Taiwanese in Taiwan.

⁵² Li, Ang. *Miyuan*. 345-346.

⁵³ Ibid., 389.

⁵⁴ Lin, Fangmei. "Interpreting The Labyrinth: Ambivalence in Gender Identification and National Identification." *Gender Discourse and Taiwan Fiction*. Ed. By Mei Jialing. Taipei: Rye Field, 2000.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 433.

⁵⁶ Li, Ang. *The Labyrinth*. 328.

⁵⁷ Li, Ang. *The Labyrinth*, 290.

⁵⁸ Qiu, 108.

⁵⁹ Li, Ang. *The Labyrinth*. 427.

⁶⁰ See Lu Zhenghui. "Gender Relations and the Reality of Taiwan Entrepreneurs in *The Labyrinthine Garden*." Jin Hengjie. "Sex and Money: Zhu Yinghong's World."

⁶¹ Wang, David Der-Wei. "Sex, Scandal, and Aesthetic Politics: On Li Ang's Sex Fiction." 18.

⁶² Wang, David Der-wei. "Sex, Scandal, and Aesthetic Politics: On Li Ang's Sex Fiction." 18.

⁶³ Wang, David Der-wei. "Sex, Scandal, and Aesthetic Politics: On Li Ang's Sex Fiction."

⁶⁴ Li, Ang. "The Devil with a Chastity Belt." 53-54.

⁶⁵ Li, Ang. "The Devil with a Chastity Belt." 66-67.

⁶⁶ Li, Ang. "The Devil with a Chastity Belt." 74.

⁶⁷ Li, Ang. "The Devil with a Chastity Belt." 75.

⁶⁸ Cai, Yani. "The Silenced Gender: On the Phenomenon of Female Nation in *Beigang Incense Urn*." (bei xiaoyin de xingbie—tan *beigang xianglu renren* cha de nuren guo xianxiang) 07/1998.

http://www.srcs.nctu.edu.tw/taiwanlit/online_papaers/WomanCoun.html 5/19/03

⁶⁹ Li, Ang. "The Empty Mourning Hall." 98.

⁷⁰ Li, Ang. "The Empty Mourning Hall." 97.

⁷¹ Jade has been an important Chinese cultural symbol that represents purity. The saying, "Better a broken jade than a whole tile," is still popular among the Chinese. It means that they would rather be dead or suffering than to compromise justice and their beliefs.

⁷² Wang, David Der-wai. "Sex, Lies and Aesthetic Politics." 36.

⁷³ Li Ang,

⁷⁴ Li, Ang. "Beigang Incense Urn." 149.

⁷⁵ Li, Ang.

⁷⁶ Li, Ang. "Beigang Incense Urn." 149.

⁷⁷ He, Chunrui. "'Incense Urn' Also Has the Right of Political Participation: Sex and Politics Are Inseparable of Course." <http://www.esouth.org/sccid/south/south19970822.htm> 5/19/03

⁷⁸ Leader of ???Party.

⁷⁹ He, Chunrui.

⁸⁰ He, Chunrui.

Chapter 4

¹ Chen, K.K.Leonard. "*Literary Hong Kong*" and *Li Bihua*. Ed. From the series of Rye Field Humanities, edited by David D.W. Wang. Taipei: Rye Field Publications, 2000.

² David Der-wei Wang.

³ Square essay refers to media (especially newspaper) column writing. "Square essay is a popular literary genre with the most Hong Kong authors and the widest readers. Its content is rich, social impact relatively great. It is short between about one thousand characters and one or two hundred characters, but it is usually about five hundred. It has a wide variety of content, covering every possible topic from politics, economics, education, art, medicine, investment, traveling, to romance and even pet caring. Its styles are also various, including flowery, nostalgic, housewifely, scholarly, patriotic, playful, gentle and quiet, coquettish, westernized, dreamy and so on." (54) Fang Zhong's "The Structure and Trend of Contemporary Hong Kong Literature." *Hong Kong Literature: Dynamic and Diversified—Proceedings of the 1999 International Conference on Hong Kong Literature*. Edited by Huang Weiliang. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2000.

⁴ Drawing from cultural studies theories on texts and contexts. See Graeme Turner, *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction*.

⁵ "Writing from Margin into Center: Li Bihua's 'Stories Newly Told.'" Wong Wang-chi, Li Siu-leung and Chan Ching-kiu Stephen. *Hong Kong Un-Imagined: History, Culture and the Future*. From the Rye Field Humanities series, No. 17. Edited by David D.W. Wang. Taipei: Rye Field Publishing, 1997. 210.

⁶ See inside the front cover of *Collected Works of Li Bihua*. 4th edition. Guangzhou: Huacheng Publishing, 2002.

⁷ See inside the back cover of *Collected Works of Li Bihua*. 4th edition. Guangzhou: Huacheng Publishing, 2002.

⁸ Ibid., 210.

⁹ Chen, Yanxia. "Against Popularity: The Li Bihua Phenomenon in Cultural Criticisms." *"Literary Hongkong" and Li Bihua*. 151.

¹⁰ Wong, Li & Chan. Footnote 1, 233.

¹¹ Wong, Li & Chan, 210-211.

¹² Chen, K.K.Leonard. "Introduction: Literary Hong Kong and Li Bihua." 35.

¹³ Gu, Yuanqing. "The Dissemination of Hong Kong Literature in the Past Twenty Years." *Hong Kong Literature: Dynamic and Diversified—Proceedings of the 1999 International Conference on Hong Kong Literature*. Edited by Huang Weiliang. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2000. In the article, Gu cites Ai Xiaoming's *A Floating City: New Selections of Hong Kong Fiction* (edited) as "the most authoritative" book of selected works by Hong Kong writers. He states that it is "inclusive, enabling readers to grasp a full picture of Hong Kong fiction in the 1980s." 778.

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- ¹⁴ During, Simon. "Introduction." 5. *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Ed. By Simon During. London: Routledge, 1994.
- ¹⁵ During, 5.
- ¹⁶ During, 17.
- ¹⁷ During, 17-18.
- ¹⁸ Liu, Denghan. "Cultural Identity of Hong Kong Literature: Nativality, Nationality, and Cosmopolitanity." *Hong Kong Literature: Dynamic and Diversified*. 4. Also see footnote 4.
- ¹⁹ Zheng, Shusen. "Forty Years of Hong Kong Literature: Colonialism, Cold War Era and Marginal Space." *Forty Years of Chinese Literature*. Eds. By Shao Yuming, Zhang Baoqin and Ya Xuan. Taipei: Unitas Literature Publishing, 1995. 50-51.
- ²⁰ Wong, Li & Chan, 106. The original statistics were from Lu Weiluan's "Reports on the Searchers on a Long Journey (in lieu of a preface)." *Hong Kong Literary Works* (xianggang wenzong).
- ²¹ See Lu Weiluan, "On 'South Coming Authors.'" In *Forty Years of Chinese Literature*. Also Wong, Li & Chan, 105-113. They argue that South Coming Authors might have had a negative impact the beginning Hong Kong literature since these authors were either editors of major literary journals or repeated contributors. In comparison, Hong Kong literature was not as sophisticated and thus its voice was overwhelmed and buried. For this subject, see Huang Kangxian, *The Development and Evaluation of Hong Kong Literature*; and Huang Weiliang, *Second Exploration of Hong Kong Literature*.
- ²² See Lu Weiluan, "On 'South Coming Authors.'" In *Forty Years of Chinese Literature*.
- ²³ Huang, Jichi. "The Development of Hong Kong Literary Subjectivity." In *Forty Years of Chinese Literature*. Huang defines "native writers" as "those who were educated (mainly secondary education) in Hong Kong, who were not necessarily born in Hong Kong but whose growing experiences were closely related to Hong Kong. 413-418.
- ²⁴ Zheng, Shusen. 52. Also see Huang Jichi. 420. In *Forty Years of Chinese Literature*.
- ²⁵ From brief biographies of both Lu Weiluan and Huang Jichi, before their co-authored essay "Sorting Out Historical Materials for Hong Kong Literature." *Hong Kong Literature: Dynamic and Diversified*. Also see Wong Wang-chi, Li Siu-leung and Chan Ching-kiu Stephen. *Hong Kong Un-Imagined: History, Culture and the Future*, 97-98.
- ²⁶ Wong, Li & Chan, 97.
- ²⁷ Lu, Weiluan & Huang Jichi. "Sorting Out Historical Materials for Hong Kong Literature." *Hong Kong Literature: Dynamic and Diversified*. 925.
- ²⁸ See Liu Denghan's "Cultural Identity of Hong Kong Literature," 5. Also Wong, Li & Chan, 97.
- ²⁹ Wong, Li & Chan, 97. Also footnote 7, 126. Ye Si is the author of *Hong Kong Cultural Space and Literature* while Huang Kangxian is the author of *The Development and Criticisms on Hong Kong Literature*.
- ³⁰ Wong, Li & Chan, 96.
- ³¹ Liu, Denghan. "The Cultural Identities of Hong Kong Literature: Nativity, Nationality, and Internationality." *Hong Kong Literature: Dynamic and Diversified*. 4. Also see note 2. Also see Cao Huimin.
- ³² Cao, Huimin. "Hong Kong Literature and Literature across the Taiwan Strait: A Spatial Observation." 32. *Hong Kong Literature: Dynamic and Diversified*.
- ³³ See Gu Yuanqing's report on the 1999 International Conference on Hong Kong Literature, "Pushing Literature Forward: Sweet but Still Bitter." *Hong Kong Literature: Dynamic and Diversified*. 949.
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